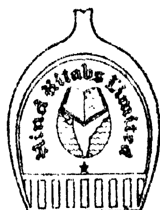
OF CABBAGES AND KINGS

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BY

HUMAYUN KABIR



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TO

MOHANDAS KARAMCHAND GANDHI

A PILGRIM OF ETERNITY

PREFACE

The speeches and addresses collected in this volume were delivered in widely differing contexts and to widely different audiences. Most of them were extemporaneous and have the laxity, and it is hoped, something of the spontaneity of the spoken word. They are published in the hope that they may be of some help in understanding some of the complex problems which still baffle us. And understanding, it is obvious, is the first step towards any attempt at solution.

Abnormal conditions in Calcutta at first held up and later prevented the printing of this book. It is now published from Bombay, though some of the problems no longer exist in their former shape. Time alone will show whether the new devices are real solutions; but one cannot help feeling that no problem has yet been solved. Our tasks still lie ahead, and there is no reason for complacence.

HUMAYUN KABIR

CONTENTS

I. THE STORM AHEAD*

I must thank you, Mr President, Sir, for giving me the privilege of welcoming the Rt Hon Mr Herbert Morrison to this House, and the more so because his support assures our victory. Even the group which opposes this motion is significant in its composition. We have, first and foremost, the honourable visitor, a socialist and a member of the Labour Cabinet, one who is better qualified to deal with this motion than any one else present in this House. Then we have the ex-Treasurer, an intellectual socialist and hardly a member of the Labour Party, or one only by apology, with no definite allegiance to any group or doctrine. He indicates like the mercury in the barometer—and his mercurial temperament invites the comparison—he indicates that storm-clouds are brewing ahead. The risks of a general election are so grave, the stakes at issue so vital and precious, that he would rather see the ship of State manned by a crew of ancient mariners with the dead albatross of killed pledges and promises weighing them down. And finally, I submit, Sir, my support of the opposition is some indication of the justice of its cause, for, as a mere student of British politics, I have no party axe to grind.

And who are the honourable members who would like to pass a vote of no-confidence in the Government and force a dissolution and a general election at a time which

* This speech was delivered at the Oxford Union during a debate on the motion: 'That this House has no confidence in His Majesty's Government.'

they themselves declare to be critical in the history of the nation? The three young Conservative gentlemen form an interesting group. We have heard one of them and two we have yet to hear, but their speeches we all know. We have only to look up old Hansards, and a hundred years ago their forebears were making exactly the same speeches, with curious affinities of phraseology that can hardly be explained by mere sympathy of sentiment. We have tonight the staunch Tory who believes what he is told without troubling to understand what he is told to believe, and acts merely as a transmitter to relay around what is broadcast from the central office. Then we have the type which sees everything through a mist which it mistakes for the halo of romance, and in a haze of distorted perspective shudders at imaginary perils, while the stark realities of the situation are not even noticed. Finally, we have the type which seeks to hide its essentially Tory character under a cloak of radicalism, and like the blue fox in the fable, seeks to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds.

Conservatives talk about economy, but when they are asked where to economize, they are either silent or evade the point. Last year, Mr Snowdon—in reply to their criticism of heavy taxation—challenged them to show where economy was feasible. Would they cut down the expenses for defence? Would they reduce the social services? Or would they suggest a repudiation of the National Debt? The Conservative critics refused to give a straight reply and could only indulge in vague talk about broadening the basis of taxation, which is only a dishonest way of saying: Put more burdens upon the poor and

reduce the standard of living in the country. When expressed in this blunt honest way, the Conservative conscience shrinks from admitting what it really intends. This fiction about over-taxation has been exploded time and again. In the face of the accumulation of gold in the Bank of England, in the face of the unprecedented increase in the savings of small investors, in the face of the complaints of bank managers about idle money, it is sheer hypocrisy to talk about over-taxation or lack of capital. Only those Conservatives bring it up who do not understand what they are talking about.

I know I shall have quoted against me Mr Snowdon and Mr Snowdon, say the Conservatives, should know. I also know that honourable members opposite have recently developed an almost ridiculous disposition to regard Mr Snowdon as an infallible Pope. But even Mr Snowdon can make mistakes, and at any rate, even he cannot unmake facts.

What are these facts? I shall deal mainly with unemployment on which the opposition seem to build their entire case. It is usual to represent unemployment as a post-war phenomenon. Those who do so forget that the Poor Law Commission reporting in 1909 was forced by the evidence to admit that about half a million people in England are permanently unemployed. The Trade Union returns of the time suggest that this is, if anything, an under-estimate. Honourable members opposite also seem to forget the volume of emigration at that period: a volume in comparison with which emigration today is negligible. If these two facts are remembered, some explanation is found of the permanent one million which

forms the most perplexing feature of post-war unemployment. The figures today are about two-and-a-half millions. Out of this about a million represent the permanently unemployed. The balance of a million-and-a-half is bad enough, but when we compare this with the three-and-a-half millions of Germany and the five millions of the United States due to the world conditions of last year, the fulminations of honourable members opposite become singularly meaningless.

To insist on this is not to deny that England has been hit by the recent slump, nor to suggest that conditions are not serious, but only to point out that it is not so dismal as honourable members opposite like to believe. They are like the impecunious relatives in *Volpone* who vie with one another in exaggerating the malady of the rich relative, of course with the scarcely concealed hope that the more serious his condition, the nearer their prospect of entering into his inheritance.

England then has weathered the storm better than any of the other nations hit by the recent slump. This, I suggest, is almost entirely due to her fiscal system. I am afraid I do not have enough time to go into details about the relative advantages and drawbacks of free trade and protection. I have no desire to enter into any complicated economic argument, partly because members opposite have yet to prove their capacity for understanding economic reasoning. It has always struck me as somewhat curious that Conservative statesmen show such a lamentable lack of comprehension in economic matters. I should like to urge upon them that the relative elasticities of demand for the export goods of different countries

constitute a factor to forget which is to commit the most serious economic blunder. When honourable members opposite speak so eloquently of tariffs (for revenue or protective purposes), they forget that the elasticity of demand for British goods is far higher than that of the goods which Britain imports. On that rock, all schemes of isolation or insulation are bound to founder.

I do not think that I need even discuss Empire free trade, for, like vegetarian cannibalism, it is a contradiction in terms, and can exist only in the heads of press lords and lunatics. In the past, Conservative practice has been wiser than Conservative protestations. Twice in ten years, while they had power, they refrained from meddling with fiscal laws. Now under the pressure of the Rother-Brook press, Mr Baldwin, like a hen-pecked husband tied to the apron-strings of shrewish wives, has yielded to their imperious wiles. Tariff alterations are part of the official Conservative policy. It has once again fallen to Mr Lloyd George to save England from such disaster. Whatever Mr Lloyd George may or may not have done in the past, whatever crimes of commission or omission his critics may bring up against him, today, when he has nothing to gain and everything to lose by keeping the Government in, when, from the tactical point of view, it is the greatest blunder to be associated with and held responsible for an administration over which he has no control, he has risked party rather than the nation. In the country's crisis he has come forward to serve irrespective of party labels, unlike the Conservatives who stand aside and sulk and would rather see the good left undone than see it done by any but themselves.

I shall not seek to defend the foreign policy of this Government, for even the Conservatives do not dare to attack it seriously. Nor do I want to dwell at any great length upon its handling of the Indian question, a province where the Conservatives have always bungled miserably. Here I can speak with some authority. When I see the change that has come about in the last two years, it seems little short of the miraculous. Journalism, specially of the type which mails the daily news, is the harlot of Fleet Street and has its own intellectual procurers. Equally contemptible is the pretence of violated virtue with which the Old Lady of Printing House Square condemns the supposed excesses of the vernacular press in India. When we consider that the Government had to struggle against these agencies of falsehood and propaganda, can any one doubt the magnitude of their achievement? When we compare their performance with that of the Conservative Party, can any sane man for a moment doubt where to place one's confidence and whom to repudiate?

I do not refer to simple souls like Mr Winston Churchill nor to reactionary diehards like Lord Lloyd, but what has the official Conservative Party ever done to deserve the confidence of this or any other House? In the Round Table Conference, they acted like a permanent query and contributed nothing to its deliberations except an irritating iteration of platitudes. It was only the statesmanship of the Liberal delegation working with the Government that gave to the Conference whatever success it had. After the Conference, the Conservatives have done everything in their power to make the prospect of a reasonable

settlement more difficult. If the situation is indeed more hopeful today—and I am sure we are all glad it is better—it is so, not because of but in spite of the activities of the Conservative Party. Whatever little chance there is that the association of India and England may be maintained on honourable terms, whatever little prospect there is of a friendly settlement of the problem of Indo-Anglian relations, the return to power of a Conservative Government would mean the frustration of any such prospect and we shall have a repetition of the struggle and strain, and a renewal of bitter feelings and suspicion and mistrust which we have seen in the last few years.

I do not think there is a single intelligent Britisher who wants India to pledge herself to the support of British control in perpetuity. I do not think there is a single thoughtful Indian who wants to sever the British connexion if only it earns the right to be preserved. If the Commonwealth means a firm political connexion, based on common interests, a healthy economic interchange making for mutual helpfulness, a new cultural relationship between great sections of humanity in which they can exchange all that is vital and valuable as equal members of the human household, if it means a close partnership in the building of a new and rich culture for the life of a fuller humanity, such a Commonwealth is a step towards the unity of the whole human race and will command the allegiance, the devotion, and the attachment of all intelligent men and women, whether from England, India or anywhere else. But if, on the other hand, it is no Commonwealth but an Empire, and empire means a market for the central power, or men, money and munitions

for planting the flag on the extreme corners of the world, if it means a massing of troops of various colours on the battleground against similar groups of Germans, Italians or Japanese, such an empire is a regression, a vulgarity and a menace to the peace of the world, and it is everybody's duty to strive against it and to mend or end it.

June 1931

II. AFTER THE DELUGE *

The last public appearance of Sir Oswald Mosley, the honourable visitor of the evening, was, I believe, Mr President, in the dock. This House offers perhaps a less unwelcome forum, for here his visits have been a little more frequent. Three years ago, almost to a day, he came to this House to plead the cause of Socialism, but much has happened since those halcyon days. The honourable visitor who began as the rising hope of the stern unbending Tories lived to be a member of a Labour Cabinet. Then came the parting of the ways, and in search of the new dispensation he left the fold of orthodoxy and has been, I fear, wandering in the outer darkness ever since. We are, therefore, specially glad that he is on the right side of the House tonight, for there is more rejoicing in heaven over one lost soul that is saved than over ninety-nine who never went astray.

The motion we are to discuss tonight is a necessary and even an obvious one. After the deluge, we must pause to survey the débâcle. I am in fact surprised that any honourable member could be found to oppose a motion like this. Even if we leave aside the question whether the National Government is good or bad, I should have thought that any intelligent person would agree that the return of the National Government is not by itself enough. Or do honourable members opposite

* This speech was delivered at the Oxford Union during a debate on the motion . 'That this House has no confidence in His Majesty's Government.'

believe that simply because the present Parliament contains a host of diehard Tories, that fact by itself is enough to solve all England's ills? Do they want to suggest that just because the Prime Minister has given us this day our daily platitude, nothing more remains to be done? At a time of the greatest anxiety for the economic position of the country, they made it face a general election, with all its dislocation and disturbance of business, its penumbra of uncertainty and risk, and now they have the face to say that the election of the National Government is enough, that nothing more need be done, for the Conservative majority is secure and the Conservative conscience is satisfied. Nero may fiddle while Rome is burning, but there are conflagrations when he wakes to find that he is caught in the web of flames that he himself lit.

We know the type of speeches we shall have from the other side. These speeches have been made before and will no doubt be made again, and if we only care to look up old Hansards, we shall perhaps find even the jokes that so delight the House handed down from generation to generation like precious heirlooms that must not be allowed to go out of the family. But beyond adding to the merriment of the House, have we ever received any serious contribution to the solution of the problems of the country and the world, from the other side? Nothing is of value to a Conservative till it has outlived its purpose. He therefore clings to the relics of a bygone age, but the world will not remain stationary merely to oblige our Conservative friends. The new needs of a new age demand new solutions. No cloak of radicalism can hide the true character of those who still

cling to the unintelligent fetishes of a vanished past. If this motion means anything at all, it means a challenge to our faith and hope: Do we want a new social order with a new vision and a new and juster world, or shall we cling to the systems of the past already patched almost beyond recognition and try to patch it once again?

It was an evil day for England and the world when the present National Government was returned. By its character and composition, it is the least suited to deal with the problems it has to face. The collapse of capitalism, in whose shadow we have been living in the recent past, demands for the overhauling of the social structure an energy, a vision and a faith which, I am afraid, I cannot expect from this coalition. The problem of Indo-Anglian relations can be faced only by a sympathy and an imagination of which, I am afraid, Mr Winston Churchill and his hordes are not capable. The tangle of international relations demands a patience and sincerity and goodwill which it is difficult to expect from the arid wastes of conservatism. It is not for nothing that the Prime Minister said, just after the elections, that the emphasis of support he had received was embarrassing. As he gazed at the serried ranks of Conservatives who looked up to him, like hungry sheep, to be fed with the three-fold folly of tariff, a high hand and strong action, he must have felt, if one can change the metaphor, like Daniel in the lion's den.

I do not intend to enter into any detailed criticism of capitalism. On the purely economic plane, the case for socialism is unchallengeable. The inherent dialectic of economic development, which has brought the capitalist system into being out of the more rudimentary forms of

economic organization, demands in its logical progress the supercession of capitalism by a socialist state. In a way, it is wrong even to say that it demands such supercession. To those who have the insight to see, socialism is not a thing of some dim distant future but a principle, however germinal, however incipient, that is alive and working today and moulding to its urgency the forms of economic structure that it has inherited from its capitalist past. In the emergence of the Trust and the Cartel, in the tendency towards integration that is inherent in every business, in the interlacing of world demand and supply, and last but not least, in the movement towards world control of finance and industry, we have evidence that in the economic sphere, the machinery for socialism is already here. Indeed, the very perfection of the machinery demands that society as a whole must take charge of the process of production. It is a power too great, a function too vital to be left to the caprices of private individuals, with all that chaos in the field of distribution of which we are the witness from day to day. It is when we come to the political aspects of socialism that we find distrust and fear and hostility. Here I must say to my Socialist friends, and especially to those who think in terms of a rigid Communist programme, that they are, to a certain extent, themselves responsible for creating that distrust. It seems to me that they have misunderstood the meaning of socialism, and for this, *Das Kapital*, which they regard as the Gospel according to St Marx, is largely responsible. They forget, as Marx himself sometimes tended to forget, that the dialectic on which he based his analysis is a living force. The rigidity of

conceptual abstractions provokes conflicts that the fluidity of human life and love and endeavour resolve with effortless ease. To admit the validity of the dialectic of economic growth is to deny that the conflict of classes is an absolute truth. With a realization of this, it becomes clear that the doctrine of class conflict— not as a theoretical formulation of the opposition of interests within society, but as a programme of conflict for political realization— is not integral to socialism. Those who preach class hatred as an end in itself forget that the aim of socialism is the creation of a society in which different types of individuals will have their own specific functions and their own specific rights. Socialism does not aim at a society in which there is no distinction or difference. Such a featureless unity would be a negation of that enrichment of life for which socialism strives. To talk of revolutions and sudden cataclysms is no doubt picturesque, but it is essentially against the spirit of socialism, whose progress is an ordered march, whose aim is the continual expansion of human life and spirit, and whose method is the continual differentiation and specialization that is the law of individuality and of growth.

What can the National Government contribute to the realization of such an ideal? How can we expect anything from it when we remember that in spite of a sprinkling of ex-Labour and ex-Liberal members, it is predominantly and fundamentally Tory? With its continual hankering after the past, and its face averted from the stark realities which demand solution here and now, conservatism has failed whenever it had to face a new situation. Have we not evidence of this already? In the

sphere of economics, even today, in the year of grace 1931, all that conservatism can offer is a system of tariffs to solve the problems of international trade. When we remember that it is the existence of tariffs and restrictions that hamper the free movement of goods and capital that is at the root of all evils, it appears, to say the least, a little paradoxical to suggest that the setting up of new walls is the remedy! Already the Empire crusaders are threatening blood and thunder if the Prime Minister does not yield to their evangelical zeal. And they number over three hundred in the present Parliament. In the present state of the devaluated pound and considering the peculiar position of English finance and industry, can any one but a Conservative suggest anything so preposterous? As for Empire Free Trade, I think I have once before compared it to vegetarian cannibalism and I will leave it at that.

But what about scientific discrimination against dumped goods? I shall be asked. And perhaps honourable members opposite will wave Mr Robertson's authority against me. Except one charming young lady who claimed she knew all about dumping but would not tell us, I have yet to meet anybody who even pretends to know what dumping is. Therefore, when I heard of Mr Robertson's proposal to tax all dumped goods, if necessary to a hundred per cent of the value, I thought that here at last I might be able to obtain sure enlightenment. I must confess my disappointment when I found that Mr Robertson has done nothing beyond laying down some general principles, principles which in their abstract generality no one has ever objected to. It is when you

point to particular categories of goods that it becomes impossible to say whether they are dumped or not, and neither Mr Robertson nor anybody can offer us much help. In any case, the proportion of dumped goods has been estimated variously at between decimal two and two per cent of the total British imports. Even in the improbable event of this being isolated, it seems to make extraordinarily little difference to the total volume of goods that come into the British isles. I may add that I am, on purely theoretical grounds, against any general system of tariffs. Tariffs are like stones thrown in the dark and one can never know what or where one may have hit. Except in the one case of infant industries, there seems to be no justification for tariffs, and specially so in view of the fact that the results at which the protectionist professes to aim can be equally well secured by Marketing Boards to control the volume of imports through centralized bulk purchases and a system of calculated bounties to make good the loss of the home producers. I am sure that the honourable visitor will have something to say on this issue, but how can he have any hopes of schemes which require such a large degree of social control from the present Parliament with its heavy Tory majority?

Turning now to imperial relations, what can we expect from this Government towards the settlement of the most outstanding dispute? I do not question that the Prime Minister and Mr Baldwin intend to stand by their word, but the problem is: Can they hope to carry their supporters along with them? When we remember the tumultuous applause with which the Tory rank and file

greet Mr Churchill's pronouncements on the subject, when we remember the history of Conservative dealings with regard to South Africa and Ireland, I cannot help feeling that if this Parliament has its way, there is mighty little chance of any peaceful settlement of Indo-Anglian relations. It was the imagination and the courage of a Campbell-Bannerman, in the face of bitter and determined opposition by the Conservatives, in the face of the distrust and fear engendered by the Boer War, in granting self-government to South Africa which explains why South Africa is still a willing member of the British Empire. It was the policy of the Conservatives, of a high hand and strong action, that has made the story of the Irish connexion one of the darkest pages in British history. That has been Mr Churchill's policy in the past and that is his policy towards India today; and I am sure that you, Sir, as an Irishman, will feel more intensely than any words of mine can suggest the danger and the futility of that policy. I refuse to learn what my countrymen feel from the pontifical utterances of ex-Governors who ruled, or rather misruled, some part of India in some antediluvian past. When we remember the rapid march of events in the last few years, when we remember that six months are almost enough to make us hopelessly out of date, their assurance and dogmatism seem, to say the least, amazing, but then perhaps ex-Governors love to rush in where angels fear to tread. We do not want a struggle for the sake of a struggle and the strain is far harder on us than anything you can even imagine here, but if we are to have a repetition of the traditional Conservative policy, the policy which caused the Boer War and against

which the Irish so bitterly fought, we shall be compelled to renew the struggle even though the strain may be almost beyond human endurance, and our last words to you will be: You can do anything with bayonets except sit on them.

I am afraid I have no time to go into details about the foreign policy we can expect from the present Government, but its Foreign Secretary, who has shivered in the chilly wastes of opposition for so long that he has now turned completely blue, does not encourage any high hopes. The record of Conservative mismanagement of European affairs is still too recent for even the wildest Tory to feel happy about it. The composition of the present Parliament and the character of its Foreign Secretary make one fear--notwithstanding Mr Macdonald and his pious platitudes--that the traditional policy of the Conservatives will be revived. The failure of the Geneva Protocol, the rejection of the Optional Clause (since then accepted by a Labour Cabinet), the sinister domination of France over a stricken Germany, the growth of mistrust and suspicion between England and the United States: that is the glorious record of achievement of which the last Conservative Government can boast. If we are going to have a repetition of the same sorry tale, I can only say: Heaven help humanity, for at the end of it, she will be beyond all earthly help!

The world is out of joint today and demands urgently for remedies that must be applied immediately to be of any use. The whole course of history is strewn with the ruins of those who could not adapt themselves rapidly enough to their new environment. Today, faced with

the issue between progress and decay, we have a Government pledged against the policy of a brave socialization in which alone lies the solution of our many problems. Those who believe with me in socialism as the only hope of our civilization and our culture know that the present Government is a snare and a delusion, but to those in this House who do not believe in socialism I should like to say. If there be among you any who believe that the poverty and the squalor of our daily lives, the misery and degradation of innumerable men and women call for rapid and radical solution; if there be any who believe that the substitution of intelligent co-operation for blind and irrational competition can remove and eradicate the enmity and hatred that cut up humanity into sections; if there be any who believe that in the replacement of the methods of war by those of peace lies the only way of salvation for this country and the world; if there be any who believe in a new order where men may find economic competence, political liberty and social justice, I do not ask you to vote for the motion tonight, I defy you to do otherwise.

November 1931

III. IN DEFENCE OF THE CELT*

It is my first and foremost duty, Mr President, Sir, to welcome Sir John Reith, the honourable visitor of the evening, and my pleasure in doing so is the greater to find him on our side of the House. Not only do I not regret that the Celt has not been exterminated, but rather I rejoice that such a misadventure has never taken place. The ex-Secretary has sallied forth to defend gallantly a cause of which he is so vital an exponent in this House. I must confess I am a little disappointed that he has not turned up tonight in full kilt and glengarry, with a war-cry that in these pacific days must deal, not death, but scorn and ridicule to the enemies of the Celt. And I am surprised, Sir, that you have not descended from your Olympian heights in all your Celtic glory to disperse in thunder this ill-conceived attack on your beloved Celts. I must make it clear that by the Celt I understand the Scot and the Irish as well as the Welsh. The Englishman likes to think that the Welsh alone are Celts, but the reason for this is not far to seek. Ireland is like a ghost that the Englishman wants to banish from his memory, but have we not on good authority that the Scots were Picts who lived in Ireland, while the Irish are Celts who lived in Scotland, and then, somehow, somewhere, they all got mixed together, but nonetheless remained the Celts they always were and shall be?

* This speech was delivered at the Oxford Union during a debate on the motion: 'That this House is of the opinion that the Celt should be exterminated.'

Yet I can understand the motives of those who support a motion to exterminate the Celts. We have heard the Treasurer and the Librarian pouring forth denunciations on the Celt. We shall hear my honourable friend from Merton trying to blow them up in laughter and smoke. The fiery eloquence of the Treasurer never burnt to better purpose, the rhythmic dignity of the Librarian's periods never swelled more harmoniously than tonight when they talked of the iniquitous Celt, but what was really behind their indictment was their resentment at the magic power of the Celt. It is not for nothing that John is a Bull; for the clumsy, stodgy John, in spite of all his tenacity and doggedness, has been led by the nose by the wily Celt. It was a Celt who ruled his destiny during the war that was to end all wars, and it was the same Celt who charmed him into a peace that threatens today to end all peace. In the dangers of peace, no less than in the dangers of war, the Saxon trusts to the Celt and his magic incantations. When crisis threatened to undermine the economic structure of this country, John Bull surrendered himself with tied hands and bandaged eyes to the ministrations of a Celt, this time a Scottish Celt, who did not know even his own mind but covered up his ignorance under a Doctor's mantle.

This is not all. It is not only in political matters that John Bull finds himself as clay in the hands of clever Celtic wizards who sometimes rouse him to frenzied activity, sometimes lull him to charmed sleep. Even in literature he finds himself the object of Celtic ridicule. Like a rustic who stands before a host of gallants who mock him in a language that is beyond his comprehension,

John Bull stands uncomfortably before the mockery of a Swift or a Shaw, a mockery which turns from elfish play to withering scorn before the poor victim can gather his wits. Even his indignation is helpless. Before the thunder of his wrath has time to rumble, the scorn has changed to wistful laughter in which pity and regret contend for mastery. The more the Englishman seeks to understand the Celt, the more baffled he feels. He tries to drown his caustic wit in drink, but not all the whisky in the world can soften the dry tongue of the Scotch. Before its sharp and bitter pungency the Saxon feels defenceless and lost.

In exasperation, the Saxon tried to conquer the Celt. Being of a heavier and sturdier build, he sought to crush the impish Celt under his superior weight. John Bull thought he had won and his troubles were ended, but like the Japanese with his jiu-jitsu, the Celt had fooled the Saxon by pretending to yield, and turned the Saxon's victory into a mockery. The Saxon conquered the Celt or at least so he thought, and ever since the Celt has been ruling the Saxon at home and abroad. Even today, when an adventurous Celt feels the spirit stirring within, he naturally casts his glance south, and standing before the borders, looks at the calm and placid lands that lie waiting for his invasion. In that inevitable southward march of the conquering Celt, you, Sir, found yourself planted in this Oxford's pleasant land. Before the Saxon knew where he was, you had mounted up that throne to smile benignly at the English whose fate and good fortune it has always been to be ruled by the Celt.

If we can, therefore, understand the exasperation of John Bull and sympathize with him, we cannot yet agree

with his unexpressed wish that the Celt should be exterminated. What would John Bull have been or done without the Celt? He cannot even express his exasperation without foreign aid. It is significant that the motion tonight had to be moved by a Slav and supported by an Afrikander. He cannot call even his soul his own, for from birth to death, he has to depend at every step upon the Celt. His religion came to him from Ireland. Even today the clergy of England are mostly Scottish. Again, it is the Scottish dominie's birch that has shaped generations of English soldiers and statesmen, empire builders and commercial magnates. In the glory of his manhood, he cannot even get drunk without the help of the ministering Scot and the beveridge his genius brewed.

Take that most typical of Englishmen, but then Johnson did not exist till Boswell took charge. Even if some individual of that name did burden the earth with his bulk and his scrofula, the real Johnson, the most English of all Englishmen, was and would have for ever remained unknown if a Scotch puppy had not barked and fawned him into existence.

Or again, take English humour: where would it have been without the Celt? It is fashionable to accuse the Celt of sentimentality, to talk of the Welsh Revivalist and to say that the Celt is so absorbed in himself and his own subjective moods that he lets the world go by unheeded till the sudden clash of the hard realities of the world makes him realize that it is impossible to live in the land of one's heart's desire, that the crude grating light of everyday must shine over fen and moor and show them up in all their naked desolation. Be that as

it may, I repeat my question: What would have happened to English humour without the Celt? Wit may be English, but that wit exists side by side with a sentimentality that is cloying and heavy. If sentimentality there must be, let it be of the Celtic type, which refines the world away in a mist of fine emotions, rather than that of the Saxon, which is of the earth earthy and loses itself in the mud of a slushy bog. It is only the wistful and elfish spirit of the Celt, at times deepening into bitter and caustic irony, that has leavened the English dough. The history of British humour is the history of the Celt. From Swift who sent Gulliver travelling and Sterne who went on his sentimental journey, and Congreve and Sheridan and Meredith, and last but not least, Shaw, the whole host of British humorists are Celts, who half in contempt and half in kindness, laugh at the bovine neighbours that nature with scarcely concealed irony has placed by them.

This we see even in the drinks that the genius of the two races have evolved. The Saxon drinks his beer and is heavy before it is drunk, but the Celt's whisky may make him drunk but never makes him heavy. So the Scotchman drinks both, but his preference is for the burning liquor which contains nimbleness of wit no less than nimbleness of motion rather than the heavy concoction which numbs body and soul to drowsy slumber.

Take again English and Celtic names. Compare the Saxon John Bull or Jack Fox or Tom Bray to the Celtic Geronwy, Rhianon or Gwendolene with all their glamour and their mystery, their suggestion of deep pathos and unexpressed tragedy. To the common dullness of the Saxon, the Celt has brought all the romance and witchery

of the distant in time and space. Chivalry is essentially Celtic. It is hard to imagine what European romance would have done without King Arthur and his knights. The golden harp of Wales that sought to catch the music of the changing light may have fallen far short of success; the brooding haunting note burning with a deep imaginative glow may only be a pale reflection of the light that shines on moor and fen; but how much poorer, how much thinner would European art have been without that dying music and that reflected glow?

I do not want to talk tonight of the Celt's long struggle—a struggle carried on against enormous odds—for liberty and a place in the sun. Whatever one may think of incidents that happened here and there, the Irish struggle for freedom shall for ever remain one of the most poignant pages in the history of the striving of the human spirit. For long ages to come, the story of Ireland's heroic fortitude and tragic sufferings shall stir to noble thought and emotion all generous hearts.

But I do not want to talk tonight of the heroism and the suffering of the Celt. I should only like to urge upon the House the value of the Celtic mystery for modern Europe. Europe today lives in the garish light of an understanding which has forgotten that the deeper life of Reason involves elements and aspects that refuse to be tied up in the merely intellective categories. The peculiar contribution of the Nordic Saxon is the development and application of machinery, but happiness cannot be manufactured. That is why the Midas touch of modern European civilization threatens to destroy all that is of deepest value in human life. In the victory of the

machine there lie the germs of death and decay. Only a return of the Celtic magic—of love for the shining peace of the infinite skies and the haunting beauty of the gleaming valley—can save Europe from her fate. Let machinery there be, but machinery employed for the enrichment of human life and the evolution of a culture which has in it place for the deep and mystic yearnings of the human soul. From the barbarism of savagery, the Celt saved Europe thirteen hundred years ago: from the barbarism of machinery it is for the Celt to save Europe today.

And what would America have been but for the Celt? We know the story of King Cophetua and the beggar maid. The Irish American tells a modernized version of the old story. In these days of feminism and emancipation, is it strange that the story should be modified to fit the new conditions of a new age? Jazz may be thoroughly bad and skyscrapers may seem a strange expression of the Celtic spirit, but what would the world of today have been without American dollars, American slang and American cinema? And what would America have been without the Celt?

February 1932

IV. SOCIALISTS INTO NATIONALISTS?*

When agreement is the order of the day, I also want to open my speech on a note of agreement, and extend the welcome of the House to the honourable visitors of the evening. Beginning as the rising hope of the stern unbending socialists, Lord Allen, the noble Lord who is to follow me, rose to be the chairman of the Independent Labour Party. Then came the parting of the ways and in search of the new dispensation, he left the fold of orthodoxy and wandered about in the wilderness till at last he found himself a member of a House against whose very existence socialism in our times has waged a deathless vendetta. As for the noble Lord who is to speak last, he is distrustful and rightly so of the crew of ancient mariners which the caprice of an uneducated democracy has put in charge of the ship of state in this most crucial period of this nation's history.

And who are the honourable members whose confidence His Majesty's Government enjoy? I have no quarrel with the ex-Secretary. He is as innocent of politics as the laughter he so readily evokes from us. As for the ex-Treasurer, his was a curious speech. The ex-Treasurer believes he has a sharp tongue—he may be right. The ex-Treasurer also believes that he speaks with his tongue in his cheek—and he may again be right. I should only like to say that the sharper his tongue, the sorrier I am for his cheek.

* This speech was delivered at the Oxford Union during a debate on the motion: 'That this House has no confidence in His Majesty's Government.'

And what reasons have honourable members for their strange confidence in this strange Government? Formed with the sole purpose of maintaining the pound at par, it knew that its policy involved a drastic retrenchment of the social services and a total stoppage of all large schemes of national development. It knew that its policy involved a reduction of the standard of life of the people. Yet it persisted in its policy, for it was composed of men who would not enter even the kingdom of heaven unless the roads were payed with the gold standard. But within a few weeks, and largely because of its own measures, the golden calf was sacrificed. The Government went merrily along the path to perdition. Since then, unemployment figures have gone up—the increase is now well above the average for this time of the year—but is the complacency of this motley Cabinet in the least disturbed? Not a suggestion has been given of any scheme for the reorganization of industry, not a hint has been offered of assistance to the work of unemployment relief. With its dead hands, it has withered whatever it has touched and to hungry men and women who cry for food, the Means Test is its only gift.

In this House, time and again, we have heard Conservatives, young and old, mumbling uncertainly about exports paying for imports and imports paying for exports, and finally unable to make up their mind, abandon the unprofitable argument and plunge into an impassioned appeal for Empire bread which to them is the concrete emblem of imperial unity. To hide their ignorance they even pretend to despise old Cobdenite shibboleths. If we are to have a resuscitation of the mercantile ghosts—and

in the recent revival of the unfavourable balance of trade we have signs that the ghosts have been disturbed from their grave—even Cobdenite incantations may be needed to lay them low. When we remember that it is the existence of tariff and restrictions which hamper the free movement of goods and capital that is at the root of the present economic ills, it appears preposterous to suggest that the setting up of new walls is the remedy. And that remedy is all the more preposterous when we remember the present state of the devaluated pound and the peculiar position of British finance and industry.

The Chancellor's own defence gives away the case. He speaks of the adverse balance of trade, but even on his own admission, the strain upon the exchange through the excess of imports has been negligible; on his own admission, almost the entire adverse balance of 1930 as compared with 1929 was due to reduced receipts from foreign investments and banking and shipping rates, and more than half the adverse balance of 1931 as compared with 1930 was due to the same cause. In his own words, 'In the last two years, the shrinkage in these invisible exports amounted to no less than about one hundred and eighty-six million pounds, nearly the whole amount of the difference.' That is the Chancellor's own analysis, but on that very analysis, if the aim is to restore the previous equilibrium, why does the Government not set about to reverse the new factor or force by which the balance has been disturbed? Why does the Government feel compelled to correct the balance of payments by diminishing imports and stimulating exports, although the ratio of imports is confessedly of little importance in the development

of that adverse balance? Did it not dawn upon the Government that the greatest part of the fall was due to the fall in the price of raw materials? Could it not even consider the possibility of backing up schemes of international action to raise the world level of prices as suggested by the Macmillan Report? Did it not occur to the Chancellor that his action was further forcing down the invisible exports? The Chancellor in despair could only cry, 'The actions, interactions and reactions of all these things are simply endless.' Precisely so, but was that not all the more reason for keeping off ground which competent economists fear to tread? The only explanation of the Government policy seems to be: 'Something must be done. This is something. Therefore this must be done.'

We have been told, and no doubt we shall be told again, that the tariff will, on the homeopathic principle, finally cure us of all tariffs. No doubt an admirable dream, but do these dreamers behind tariff walls realize that the first and natural reaction to the British tariff will be that protectionists all over the world will feel that they have always been right? John Bull has always been looked upon as a shrewd businessman, and his falling in would be regarded as confirmation that tariffs offer the only solution of the economic crisis today. They will forget, as readily as the Chancellor of the Exchequer forgot, that protectionist America has over ten millions unemployed. They will forget, as readily as the Chancellor forgot, that tariff walls failed to keep unemployment out of Germany and the spectre of unemployment is striding over all the barriers that France has sought to raise. All these they will

forget as the Chancellor of the Exchequer has forgotten them, and only remember that England, the last home of free trade, has come over to the protectionist camp. Bigger and better tariffs will be the cry all over the world, and we shall have the trade and industry of the world broken up into a thousand fragments, and perhaps among the ruins of Great Britain's international trade, we shall hear the Chancellor singing a lonely dirge lamenting the glory of vanished days.

This is not all. It is not only in the sphere of economic relations that the present Government is heading England towards disaster. Its foreign policy, if policy it can be called, is even more dangerous. Even the warmth of office has not cured the chill which turned its Foreign Secretary completely blue. His cold numb spirit has introduced a pusillanimity into his policy that is of evil portent. Tied to the apron-strings of French policy, Sir John has given an exhibition of ballet dancing that for turns and twists and pirouettes has never been equalled. In the Disarmament Conference, when the French proposals went against the grain, he dared not speak out and went dumb; it was left to others to make any effective criticism of the French suggestions. He has seen the danger in Germany and tasted the Dead-Sea fruit of reparations, but dare not make a stand against the dictation of his chosen mistress.

It is in the Far East that the policy of the National Government has borne the bitterest fruit. When in September last, in flagrant violation of the Nine-Power Treaty and the Kellogg Pact and the Covenant of the League, Japan invaded Manchuria, the National Government

was content to sit in passive contemplation of what it persuaded itself was no act of war. I do not presume to judge whether or not Japan had any grievances in Manchuria. The fact remains that if she had a case, she destroyed it by her own wanton action in resorting to violence. With all the other nations of the world, she had solemnly renounced war as an instrument of national policy. When America felt compelled to send a note of protest to Japan in January last, Great Britain lacked the courage or the will or both to add its voice to that protest. Now that British interests are threatened in Shanghai, the Foreign Secretary seems suddenly to have waked up. Even now his policy is marked by a lack of courage and decision that is most dangerous in these critical times. Five months ago, a strong stand by the League was possible without any of the dangers which five months of war-fever have engendered in Japan. Five months ago, a strong stand by the League would perhaps have saved the world from all the cruelty and misery that are the necessary concomitants of war. Five months ago, a strong stand by the League would have proved to the world that international justice is not merely a fine sentiment but a strong and living force that no one dare defy with impunity. In the East and in the West, the National Government have sown the seeds of storm, and as sure as night follows day, the whirlwind will burst upon those who succeed to their heritage. This National Government had the chance of relieving a desperate Germany that smarted under a sense of injustice and cruelty. This National Government had the chance of adjusting the economic system of Europe

that staggers under the burden of an iniquitous treaty. It let the opportunity slip by of making a gesture that might have altered the course of history. And today, the thunder of war in the Far East mocks the Covenant and the Kellogg Pact and proclaims the bankruptcy of its foreign policy.

My time is almost up and I have not many words about the policy of this Government with regard to India. Of that I have spoken often enough in this House, and on this, perhaps the last occasion that I have the honour to address this House, I should only like to say that we in India do not want a struggle for the sake of a struggle and the strain is far heavier on us than anything you can even imagine here. But if there is no other alternative -- and today in India we have no other choice—if batons and bayonets are the only language which the Government knows how to speak, I can only say that batons may break the bodies but not the spirit of an awakening people, bayonets may compel temporary obedience but cannot command devotion or loyalty. I refuse to believe that that is the last word of young England. I refuse to believe that you and your generation will force us to a course which wherever it might finally lead would go through the valley of the shadow of death. I refuse to believe that you and your generation will lack the courage and the vision that can find the germs of hope even in the ashes of utter despair.

From the point of view of British interests in international trade, it is necessary that the present Government must be thrown out. From the point of view of foreign politics and friendship and amity among nations instead

of the chaos of international piracy under the shadow of which we shudder today, it is imperative that the present Government must go before it has completely ruined the cause of international peace. And from the point of view of a commonwealth of nations, in which different races and different cultures might find a place, an ideal of unity which in encompassing the entire world would cease to be merely British—from the point of view of such an ideal, it is the right and the duty of this House to refuse its confidence to a Government that is making for ever impossible the realization of that dream.

March 1932

V. POLITICS AND MUSLIM STUDENTS

The problem which dwarfs to relative insignificance all other problems in India is the problem of Independence. The more I think about it, the more acutely I feel that the settlement of all our difficulties is concentrated in the solution of this one stupendous problem. Poverty can be fought only if the machinery of the State is controlled in the interests of the community. The development of trade and industry is best achieved through the employment of political power for the purposes of national reconstruction of society. But this also makes it clear that the problem is not one of political freedom alone, it is one of economic and social freedom as well. If the British should decide to transfer the administrative machinery of the country to the control of a handful of the Indian intelligentsia, would it be freedom in the true sense of the term? Some—especially of the privileged classes—would probably hail it as the dawn of a new political era, but would it necessarily solve the problem of our hungry millions, of the masses who have lived in degradation and deprivation even in the ages when political power was wielded by men of our own race or nationality? If the history of Europe during the last hundred years has taught us anything, it has taught us that political liberty apart from economic justice has little or no meaning. That is why in the Europe of today, the cult of unrestricted individualism and personal liberty is seeking its fulfilment in the concept of social control and economic justice. That is why today in all countries of the West, the State

claims and exercises influence in every sphere of social life, determines the conditions that shall govern the relation of capital and labour and even prescribes the law under which wealth can be produced and utilized.

Without economic and social freedom, political liberty therefore has little content. Yet on the other hand, political liberty is the basis of economic and social freedom. Political liberty seeks its fulfilment in economic equality and these jointly lead to the realization of social justice and freedom. That is why our first objective must be the achievement of political liberty; that objective realized, a series of new possibilities will be revealed to us; but till that has been achieved, all our visions must remain the idle dreams of a mere visionary.

Political freedom is therefore the first objective of all our endeavours. Some may suggest that even if it be so, a student conference is hardly the occasion for formulating it. I would put only one or two questions to such doubters. Are discussions about the system of education obtaining in our country a proper question for a student conference? If it is, can we talk of educational reform without the idea of carrying out such reforms at least in the background of our minds? And can we think of reforms except in reference to political power through which they may be realized?

Take again the spectre of unemployment which is sapping the vitality and undermining the confidence of so many of our young men. Shall that question be taken up in a student conference? Can we raise the question of social utilization and service of young men without bringing in its train hundreds of questions about the

structure of the State or the organization of the social framework? And suppose we take up the question of the educated unemployed. Can we rest content there without bringing in the question of unemployment among the masses, in a word, without bringing in the problem of poverty and hunger, and what is that if not a political question?

Politics cannot therefore be avoided by students even if we would, and perhaps on deeper consideration, we should not even if we could. Politics is the reflection of the organized life of society. Without some political training, our education remains one-sided and incomplete. May we not seek the reasons for our political immaturity and fickleness in the fact that as students—within the narrower confines of student life—we lacked the opportunity or the inclination or both of acquiring political experience?

What I have so far said applies generally to all students, but it has special application to the case of Musalman students in India. There is no denying that the history of the last 100 or 150 years is for Indian Musalmans a history of degradation and deterioration. Loss of political power was followed by the loss of spiritual resilience. For almost a century, Muslim India contented itself with dreaming of the glories of the past without any attempt to analyse the causes of its discomfiture, or acquire the new technique which enabled others to triumph over it. The policy of utter non-co-operation which Muslim India followed was no doubt natural, and perhaps even unavoidable, but it was not wise. The heritage of self-centredness and defeatism which it left behind has been

fraught with the gravest consequences for the political fate of not only Indian Muslims, but of India as a whole.

Leaders who were brought up in that atmosphere could not perhaps help reflecting the mentality of that age. They looked at the world with defeatist eyes, without confidence in their own power to defend themselves. That is why almost all our older leaders speak only in terms of safeguards and reservation, of special treatment and concessions, of pacts and guarantees, of careful avoidance of all risk, and frantically endeavour to cling to the little that has been saved from the general ruin. That is why, it seems to me, a political leader of the undoubted capacity and individual courage of Mr Jinnah dare not accept for the community the rough and tumble of free competition, but must for ever advise it to avoid the risks of political struggle till we have first become strong. It is on this point that I should like to offer a few comments and contend that, even if we accept their general premises and desire the protection of the special interests of the community, the methods they advocate are not suited to that end—in fact, are bound to lead to the defeat of the very purpose which they profess.

We are told that Muslims must have separate organizations in order to become strong, but we are not told how separate organizations by themselves can make a community strong. Can we acquire strength if we remain outside the political struggle and enjoy the privileges which a harassed Imperialism may offer us in an attempt to buy us off? Can we acquire strength unless we pull our weight in the national struggle, and through hardship, through sacrifice, through the power of suffering regenerate the

community? Power without the power of sacrifice is a vain delusion, and Indian Musalmans must realize that there is no short-cut to political resurrection.

Can even pacts or promises guarantee us our security, though I do not deny that for some time, such pacts may under certain conditions be useful in creating a better atmosphere? But what after all is a pact or treaty worth? Have we not seen time and again in the history of the world treaties treated like the merest scrap of paper by those who could do so with impunity? Will not those who still hunger for a pact with Hindus or others realize that such pacts are of use only so long as a third party is there to guarantee their observance? Let the third party go and who shall compel the observance of the pact? And if on the contrary, Musalmans are strong enough to enforce such pacts, do they need them at all?

Therefore those who think of pacts are really thinking in terms of the indefinite continuation of British domination over India. This may be natural to men who were brought up in the atmosphere of defeatism of the last century, but shall the young men of this century, shall the present generation who were born in the midst of the struggle for national emancipation allow the dead weight of the past to crush their new awakening to life? And to those who say that we should not join in the national struggle without a settlement with the Hindus, I would put only one question—Is the freedom of India the objective of Hindus alone? Have we not an equal claim and an equal yearning for it? Shall it not be our privilege to bring Indian freedom nearer than it has been?

When the British came to India, Muslims non-co-operated with the education and the science they brought. The result is that we are today at least half a century behind the others in prosperity and power. Shall we commit the same blunder again and non-co-operate with this national struggle only to wake up belatedly and find that we are again half a century behind in the power of sacrifice, in endurance and in the courage of suffering?

One thing I have never understood is the failure of so many of our Muslim leaders to realize that power is entirely a question of mental outlook and spiritual integrity. They often complain that we are a minority community, and must obtain the special consideration to which minorities are entitled. But is it really proper for a community of eighty millions to sap its own strength by continual disbelief in its own power? Let alone eighty millions—even eight millions of men, provided they have courage and determination, constitute a proposition before which the mightiest power shall quail. Why should we forget that the days of Muslim glory were the days when Musalmans were everywhere in a minority? Why do we forget that the British who dominate us today are in numbers insignificant when compared to us? Why do we forget that even under British domination, the influence of the Hindus in Bengal is the influence of a minority over a majority?

You who are the symbol of the youth of Muslim India must therefore forget that you are a minority, must forget what has been continually drilled into your ears and repudiate the idea that you are weak or incapable. You must regain your own self-confidence and declare in

unmistakable terms that weak we are not, on others we shall not depend, but shall carve our own destinies by our own endeavours. I would once again have you reiterate that we are not afraid, we are not incapable: it is only weak and short-sighted leadership that has weakened us, blinded us and made us diffident and hesitating before the play of world forces.

I have tried to argue that these older leaders were for historic reasons bound to look at things from the point of view of a defeatist mentality. Their outlook was the outlook of the last century with its discouragements, its failures and its despair, but you who have been born into a new India of a new century, it is for you to declare that the defeats and distresses of the past have no meaning for you. For you the reality is the expansion of the Indian mind, of its continual endeavour after freedom and light: already you have in your hearts the foretaste of victory and achievement. From this vantage ground of national regeneration, you must declare that those who label as weak the youth of the community are doing the greatest possible disservice to the community and the country.

Nor is this all. Those leaders who look at things from the defeatist point of view of the last century and urge that we must get strong before we stand shoulder to shoulder with others in the fight for freedom, forget that even if this were possible, where is the time? We have already seen that it is impossible to become strong by standing aloof, we have already seen that the source of power is in the mind's freedom and courage, in its ability to defy overwhelming might with its solitary strength. But even if pacts and safeguards could make us strong, where is the

time for it? How can we forget that India forms only a part of a world system and must therefore react to every movement of the world? Is it not clear that the world is heading towards a crisis and any moment there may be an explosion that will rock our political structures to their very depths? How can one, in this world gone mad, even for a moment dream that we shall be allowed the leisure to gain strength through pacts and partitions with other communities under the common protection of a foreign power?

Those of our leaders who dream that under the protection of a third party they will come to terms with the other communities of India, seem to exhibit an amazing lack of the sense of realities. For if the crisis in Europe becomes acute, will the British think for a moment about Muslim interests? Shall we forget what happened to Britain when the Romans abandoned them to their fate? Cannot our leaders wake to the consciousness that the force of events may compel the British to abandon India, and much sooner than any of us imagine today? Any moment there may be a conflagration in the East or the West: to whom shall the British turn in the moment of stress? To those who dream of achieving strength in the future, or to those who through sacrifice and struggle, through conflict and suffering, have won confidence in themselves and are ready to face the might of British Imperialism?

Where is the place for a communal organization in this picture, and least of all for a communal organization of the students? Communal interest is a term that is freely bandied about, but if we pause to consider it coolly,

whose interest are we thinking of? The vast majority of India's toiling masses—irrespective of their religious or communal loyalties—suffer from hunger and poverty. Their sole cry is for more food and cloth, for the barest necessities of life, for the recognition of their claim to the minimum human standards. Is there any conflict of interest among them? If agricultural prices go up, they rejoice equally: a slump is equally disastrous for both the Muslim and the Hindu peasants. Better sanitation and better irrigation are their common demands. The conflict of interest is therefore only among the aristocracy, the middle classes and the intelligentsia, for those who enjoy the good things of life. That is why there is talk of sharing the posts and offices in the State, that is why there is such clamour on both sides for weightage in representation and political power. Shall we as young men make this realization of our selfish ends the sole objective of all our activity? The student community of the country are therefore faced with two alternatives: the satisfaction of the self-interest of a few individuals through communal organizations and pacts, or the endeavour to realize our common humanity in an attempt to reconstruct society in the interest of the masses who have till now in history been always deluded and oppressed. Shall we choose our personal ends, or shall we choose the impersonal good which will enrich our life through the creation of new social values and new social standards?

One fact we must not forget. How far can communal organizations and pacts carry us? Is it possible to find jobs for every individual without thorough revision of the principles on which society is based? Would there have

been unemployment in England or America if the present social structure could find employment for every member of society? And if England and America fail, what chance is there of success in India? How many jobs can the State create? For every man who gets a job, ninety-nine must suffer disappointment. Shall the student community of India hanker after personal gains that are at best uncertain and elusive, and sacrifice the interests of the suffering millions of the land?

This is the crux of the problem of a communal organization for students. Our national life is torn by a hundred dissensions. A hundred conflicts of personal interests obscure our vision. But among the youth of the country, among the students of India, there must be the idealism and the courage that can rise above the petty personal point of view and encompass a vision that comprehends the interests of all. The students of India must rise above their personal or their class interests and work for the emancipation of their motherland. They themselves come largely from the middle classes, and perhaps for some of them, the communal conflicts may mean personal gain, but we have already seen the futility to which such personal self-seeking is bound to lead. It is the youth of the world that has always responded to the challenge of an ideal and the youth of India—particularly the Muslim young men of India—must today accept that challenge of history.

Muslim students of today must therefore stand shoulder to shoulder with their brothers of other creeds and communities in solving the common problems of the world. They must examine the shortcomings and failures of our

history and work in the clear light of reason, as a disciplined force, for the realization of the India of our dreams. Even today, the civilization of India is neither Hindu nor Muslim, for the two strands of their contribution are mixed up inextricably together. It is therefore foolish for Hindus to boast of it as only theirs: it is stupid for Muslims to try to shun it as something alien. But what the students of today—Hindus and Muslims—must realize is that the construction of that civilization has hardly begun; it is their duty and their privilege to bring it to a completer fruition. The struggle for political liberty is only the first step in that endeavour. And that first step shall not be taken till the students of India, irrespective of creed, community or province, pledge themselves to one common solidarity and one common brotherhood.

December 1937

VI. FINANCE AND RECONSTRUCTION

Mr President, Sir, I shall confine myself only to some of the general principles of finance and reconstruction while speaking on the budget. I shall commence by saying that it will not be unfair to describe this budget as embodying two principles. On the one hand, we might call it a propaganda budget, and secondly, we might call it a middle-class employment budget. When we heard that a crore of rupees had been allotted to nation-building departments, we thought that this budget was a budget of great expectations, but when we examined the manner in which the money had been distributed, we realized with regret that instead of being a budget of great expectations it has turned out to be a budget of frustrated hopes. I shall offer only one or two comments on the principles which I enunciated a moment ago as embodied in the budget. It is a budget which is definitely planned from the point of view of middle-class employment. The Hon. the Finance Minister has himself in one part of his statement drawn our attention to it. That is a very important question, but what I would ask at this stage is whether we can solve the question of middle-class unemployment without reference to the wider context in which such questions occur. It may be true that if 10,000 appointments are given to members of the middle-class, it will to a very large extent go towards mitigating the clamours of those who are politically discontented, but the question which the Hon. the Finance Minister ought to keep before himself is a different one. He should ask

himself: Is it going to increase the purchasing power of the peasants? Is it going to improve the economic condition of the community as a whole? I think I shall have to refer more than once to the formulation of the three problems which he has himself enunciated, and I shall ask, if his budget satisfies the criterion he has himself laid down.

That is one aspect of the budget, and the other is that this budget is definitely a propaganda budget, in which money is scattered over a large number of items, very often without proper planning, and without a proper appreciation of the way in which the same amount could have been better utilized. I shall accept the analysis which the Hon. the Finance Minister has himself offered of the three most pressing problems of Bengal, namely, the solution of the problem of rural indebtedness, the spread of primary education, and the stimulation of the prices of agricultural commodities, and I shall try to examine how far in the budget which we have before us today these three crying problems of the province are properly met. . . .

First, with regard to rural debts, I would submit that the remedies which he has suggested are of little use in meeting the problem in all its implications. He has proposed to establish more Debt Settlement Boards, which is welcome so far as it goes, but we must remember that the average size of a holding in Bengal is only five *bighas*, and the average income per *bigha* is about Rs. 15 of which Rs. 2 goes to the payment of rents. That leaves an ordinary family with only Rs. 65 a year. If Rs. 65 is the total earning of a family, it is difficult to see how the problem

of rural indebtedness can be met. Unless the purchasing power and the earning capacity of the tenantry can be improved, Debt Settlement Boards may settle debts, but the debts will remain unpaid.

Then we find that there is a proposal to send certain officers to Denmark. That proposal is rather surprising to my mind. I do not know whether the Hon. the Finance Minister is aware that the co-operative movement in Denmark is a movement almost entirely directed towards the organization of export markets and has very little to do with credit societies, while the question in Bengal is essentially one of rural credit. Here in Bengal there are 23,000 primary societies, 19,000 of these are credit societies and only 4,000 are societies of other types. Therefore it does not seem clear why in Bengal, where the problem is essentially one of rural credit, officers should be sent to Denmark where the question and solution are not with regard to rural credit, but with regard to the organization of export markets. The Hon. Minister's policy reminds me of the saying: 'Something must be done. This is something, and therefore this must be done.'

I would here refer to the Hon. Minister's observations on this question in an earlier part of his speech, where he clearly states that the economic problem of Bengal cannot be solved today without reference to the problem of other countries. This is particularly so today; since we have now become dependent upon grants from the Central Government, the jute export duty and a share of the income-tax, this inter-relation between the provincial revenues and the general condition of trade in the world outside has become even closer. But even though the

Hon. Minister has made a correct analysis, I am sorry to find that the proper conclusion has not been drawn. In fact there has been an attempt, if I may say so, to shirk a proper analysis by suggesting that the State cannot undertake the development of heavy industries or key industries in order to establish a proper balance of distribution between the proportion of population which is dependent upon agriculture and that which is dependent upon industry. That is a statement which we challenge, for we hold that State initiative and support can help the growth of new industries more than anything else.

If we go into the figures, we find that in Bengal eighty-five per cent of the people are dependent on agriculture, whereas we also know that for the proper economic welfare of a country at least thirty per cent of the people must depend on industry. From that point of view, France which is one of the most happily placed countries in the world, serves as an example. In France sixty per cent of the people depend upon agriculture and forty per cent on industry, but in Bengal, we have eighty-five per cent of the people dependent upon agriculture and only an infinitesimal portion of the people dependent upon industry. Of course the Finance Minister may say, and he has said, that this is not primarily a concern of the State. He has said that these heavy industries must be organized by private initiative. But in this he has gone against the experience and example of other countries. I would ask him and his advisers to refer to the case of the Lancashire Cotton Corporation which was inaugurated under the direct control of the Bank of England and with the co-operation, knowledge and help of the Government

of the country. I could refer him also to the London Passenger Transport Board and to the Central Electricity Board and again to the British Broadcasting Corporation. In all these cases, it was the Government that took the initiative, and particularly in the three latter cases it is Government that has organized the industries and thrown open many sources of employment to a vast proportion of the people of the country. I might also refer to the experience and history of France and Germany, and last but not least, Russia.

I would submit with regard to Bengal that there are, at any rate, two industries on which Government might with profit concentrate. There is the heavy chemicals industry and there is the question of textiles. If we look at Government figures again, we find that the total consumption of cotton cloth in Bengal is in the neighbourhood of 850 million yards of cloth per year and of this Bengal mills supply us with only 150 million yards and hand-looms supply us with another 180 million, so that there is clear room for expansion up to about 500 million yards of cloth which can be manufactured in Bengal. If this were done, not only would it help to solve the general problem of unemployment in the country—including the problem of educated as well as uneducated unemployment—but it would also to a very large extent increase the wealth of the country and give the Finance Minister those resources which he wants for increasing the social service aspect of the State. It may be asked, why should Government risk revenues of the province on industries in which the returns are not certain? But if we look at Government figures again, we find that the textile industry offers a

field in which the room for uncertainty is very small. We find that the Bangalakshmi Cotton Mills declared in 1937 a dividend of five per cent. Some other mills declared dividends of ten per cent or more, and there are other mills with shares of the face value of Rs. 100 with prices going up to the extent of Rs. 295. It may be suggested that this refers only to certain particular mills. But that is not the case. If we look at the general position of the textile industry in Bengal, we find that in 1931 Bengal had thirteen working mills out of a total of three hundred and twelve in India. In 1936 it had gone up to nineteen and there will soon be about twenty-four more mills. There is still room for further development and Government could help very largely by giving subsidies, by guaranteeing a certain rate of profit and in other ways.

There is one other industry about which Government should make up their mind. There is the question of the heavy chemicals industry, and that is all the more important because many of the other important industries depend on it. Again I am referring to a Government publication. In the five-year plan for industrial development in Bengal, it is clearly laid down, on page three, that we are 'interested in heavy chemicals, which are the key industrial products and as such are of fundamental importance to any country. The chemical industry in Bengal is in its infancy, and yet there are many flourishing manufacturing concerns in the country which have to depend on imported caustic soda, bleaching powder, etc.' If there be a war, and who can say there will not be one, what guarantee is there that imports will continue? In the Government report itself, it is stated that many of the

flourishing industries in Bengal will be affected by the failure in supply of such chemicals and the report says that Government should, therefore, substantially help the establishment and development of such heavy chemicals industries.

Not only is there room for the establishment of such industries and for their development, but the people of Bengal have also shown a peculiar skill in the development of the heavy chemicals industry. I have singled out these two industries, namely, textiles and heavy chemicals, because without the support of the State, and often in spite of adverse manipulation of railway rates to which reference has been made by the Finance Minister himself, these industries have made a position for themselves in India, and I put it to the Finance Minister to consider the question of improving the general economic condition of the province by helping those industries. It cannot be overlooked that the country must be industrialized, and unless it is industrialized, all talk about improvement in the condition of the peasantry is bound to be sheer moonshine.

Again, I should like to say something about jute. Some of the suggestions which some of us made in the last session have been to some extent incorporated in the Finance Minister's statement and for that we are grateful. There is a provision for regulated markets, but he stops there, he does not go far enough. On the other hand, there is a provision for a jute census at a cost of rupees one lakh and also provision of a further sum of Rs. 50,000 for jute restriction propaganda. I fail to understand why there should be a fresh jute census at this stage. Have

not Government published jute forecasts in the past? Were not these forecasts given as authorized forecasts? If Government have the machinery for jute restriction propaganda, and we have been told that last year also a sum of money in the neighbourhood of Rs. 90,000 was spent on jute restriction propaganda, can they not utilize that machinery for getting the necessary figures for controlling the jute markets? The duplication of expenditure on jute census and jute restriction propaganda seems to be uncalled for and is a serious reflection upon the Government's own past activities. If the forecasts in the past were accurate, we have the census already; if they were not, why was public money wasted on them? Further, if jute restriction officers have worked with earnestness, they have the figures for preparing a census; if they have not, what justification was there for wasting public money on them?

I would also remind the Hon. the Finance Minister of one or two other matters which were mentioned in this House last time. He might find a very profitable source of income from jute on the lines of the process tax which is levied in America. There is also no provision in the budget for extending the use of jute. In other countries, we find that jute has also been used for producing fibres resembling wool. If we can extend the use of jute, we can increase the purchasing power of the peasantry of the country and it is in this way alone that we can increase the general prosperity of the people.

I have referred to the establishment of the heavy chemicals industry from one point of view. It is important not only from the point of view of the industrial development

of the country and the improvement of the economic position of the people of the province, but also from another point of view, namely, in connexion with the question of agriculture and the need of irrigation works. In his statement, the Finance Minister has told us that we cannot have any large-scale irrigation scheme unless the people of the country are prepared to pay for such irrigation schemes. It is in this connexion that the heavy chemicals industry becomes important. When we remember that today in Bengal the actual agricultural produce may be regarded as solely confined to paddy and jute, and that for almost all other food-stuffs we depend on other provinces, one may ask, why is it so? On account of lack of artificial manures, pulses, cereals, linseed and other crops are not now cultivated in Bengal. If we had developed the heavy chemicals industry, this would have been possible. It is connected with the question of irrigation in this way. Unless agriculture is paying irrigation schemes may prove uneconomic, and agriculture in Bengal requires artificial manures. This question is important because we find that of the total land surface in Bengal, seventy-one per cent is arable, and out of that, only forty-seven per cent is actually cultivated; in other words, out of the total arable area in Bengal only two-thirds is utilized. Yet the Hon. the Finance Minister has said that the country is poor and that we cannot expand our irrigation schemes without further taxation! Here is room and necessity for such service. If we have properly planned irrigation works, these lands can be brought under cultivation. I refer to the thirty-three per cent of land that is not cultivated now, but the Hon.

the Finance Minister asks where will he find money for any irrigation works which may be undertaken from time to time? I have already suggested at least one source from which the money could be obtained.

Further, this question has to be faced not from the point of view of making it a money-earning concern of the Government but from the point of view of improving the general economic life of the province. If we allow one-third of the arable land area to lie fallow, are we not wasting potential wealth? The Hon. the Finance Minister has himself pointed out there is today bad health in many areas, in many areas the population is decreasing, and all this is due to the fact that there is no proper irrigation and drainage in the country. If these two are properly carried out, without any special consideration and anxiety for the revenue due to the Government, I submit that even as a financial proposition, Government would gain in many ways.

Then there is the question of retrenchment and I shall refer last to primary education. With regard to the question of retrenchment, I am afraid that the Hon. the Finance Minister has looked at it entirely from the point of view of the employees of the Government. When we look at the standard of life in our country, it cannot be denied that a good deal of economy is possible by retrenchment in the salaries of higher grades; but though we want to scale down the salaries of the higher grades of service, we do not want to scale down the salaries of the lower grades of service. The total cost of administration may not therefore decrease. Nevertheless, the whole question has to be looked at from the point of view of social

welfare, social utility and total social happiness. I contend that even if there be no actual absolute retrenchment in the total cost of administration, still it would be a gain so far as the community is concerned. It would be a gain so far as the province is concerned, if people could lead a happier life, if people could lead a more human life, and if the state of inequality which we find in the society of today is not allowed to exist any more. I would go further and say that even though directly there may be no retrenchment, still this would open up to the Finance Minister new sources of revenue, because new groups of people would come within the income-tax limit, new groups of people would make new types of purchases, and through customs and in other indirect ways, the revenue of the province would ultimately and indirectly benefit.

Finally, I come to the question of primary education which, in my opinion, is absolutely the keystone of the whole structure of provincial improvement. Here, I am afraid, Government have miserably failed. Government have provided for five additional lakhs of rupees, and the total is about thirty lakhs of rupees, for primary education grants to private institutions and individuals or some Government institutions which have undertaken the work of primary education. Reference has been made to the scheme of introducing primary education in Mymensingh and reference has been made to proposals for inaugurating such schemes in certain other districts. All these have been cited in support of what the Government have done for extending primary education in the country. If the District Board of Mymensingh by the utilization of the

Primary Education Act on their own initiative and by the realization of a special cess educate Mymensingh, it is the people of Mymensingh who are educating themselves. Government cannot claim any credit for that. In fact, I would submit Government have failed in their duty, because the Hon. the Education Minister and other members of Government have openly declared that free and compulsory education without fresh taxation is not only a possibility, but it shall be carried into effect before the year is up. I cannot say that this statement is irresponsible, when it comes from one who is today the leader of the Government and the head of the executive of this province. I cannot say that this is an irresponsible statement, when I remember that he had previously held the portfolio of education and knew what were the possibilities and potentialities, and what the obstacles and difficulties were in facing that question. I make bold to say that if Government had only the will, they could without the imposition of any fresh education cess, introduce free and compulsory primary education for the whole of the province. I may claim that I am not given to making irresponsible statements in public, and it is with a full sense of responsibility that I say that if this Government wills, it can introduce free and compulsory primary education in Bengal, and universal literacy will be a reality, not in some distant future but within the course of five or ten years.

One or two schemes for finding part of the money, I have myself suggested, not only to the present Government but to the Government which was in power before. The other day I found that one of the schemes which I

suggested to the Hon. the Education Minister of the time has recently been utilized by the Government of the United Provinces. But I would go further and say that even without any special measure, simply by a proper control of the administrative machinery of the Government and of the resources which the executive officers of the districts and sub-divisions can command, the Government could solve the question. I would also add that we have had an unexpected increase from the jute export duty which is for us a windfall. This is money which is derived from the labours of the agricultural classes. This is money which is derived from the sufferings and privations of the peasants, and I submit that this money should have gone to the amelioration of their condition, to giving them primary education which is not merely a question of literacy but is a question of reorganizing the whole rural life of Bengal. We cannot have proper sanitation, we cannot have a proper appraisement of the economic resources of the province, we cannot have a scheme of irrigational work and its proper use, unless the people are improved, unless human material is improved; and therefore the problem of primary education is the fundamental problem in Bengal today.

February 1938

VII. POLITICS AND EDUCATION

We have met today in the historic city of Delhi, a city rich in its culture and traditions, a city where the fate of India has been decided more than once, for better or worse. Here have met various forces which have shaped our destiny and made India the land of rich, complex and often contrary modes of life. Today, again, we have met at a time when crisis faces not only the culture and civilization of India, but of the world as a whole. Rival schools of thought and opposed ideals of life divide and distract the energies of those who want to build the foundations of a new society, and bewilder the minds and intellects of thinkers and workers alike. At such moments and on such occasions, we must undertake a re-examination of the foundations of our accepted beliefs, and I shall consider our Conference justified if it helps us to understand more clearly the nature of the problems with which we are faced and the solutions we must attempt if we are to rescue the world from the anarchy from which it suffers today.

What I have said makes it unmistakably clear that students should not, even if they could, keep aloof from politics. This is a point which I have often discussed and which once needed discussion, but today the force of circumstances has brought us to a pass where no discussion on the point is necessary any more. It was only a misunderstanding, a misunderstanding only too natural in a politically unfree country, of the organic connexion between student- and after-life that led people to suggest

the abstention of students from participation in politics. But where would such a suggestion lead to if followed to its logical sequel? In the true sense, one's student life never ends, for increase of experience brings with it increase of knowledge and this is a process which must continue to the end of one's life. On the other hand, devotion to a cause, the instinct and the power to sacrifice one's personal interests for the sake of an ideal are qualities as necessary in after-life as in the days of student-hood. The attempt at artificial division of life into compartments which have nothing to do with one another has been the bane of our life and the sharp distinction we try to make between student- and after-life is only one of its expressions. That is why our student life is so often restricted and cramped and our worldly life frustrated and vain. As students we try to deny the demands life makes upon us and as grown-up men we lose the emotional urgency and selflessness of student days.

It is, therefore, a happy sign that students in our country are today taking an active part in politics. And this they must, when we remember the crisis in culture and civilization under whose shadow we constantly live. From the point of view of practical necessity as well, the participation of students in politics is inevitable. Open the paper in the morning and every column is full of political news and political views. Is there any one who will say that in the attempt to avoid politics, students must give up reading papers and shut themselves up as recluses in a scholastic monastery? And once they read papers and form their views, how to draw the line between theory and its application? Is discussing politics among friends a

crime? Does it become one the moment, instead of an audience of a dozen friends, you expound the same views before an audience of a few hundreds or thousands, some of them not friends? Again, students have their own problems and yet when they attempt to solve them, they find that it inevitably takes them into the region of what we call politics. The system of education which obtains in our country is bound to evoke criticism. Shall we not try to change it simply because the attempt may lead us to the borders of the forbidden land of politics?

Students must prepare themselves for future participation in social life, and what is politics but the organized expression of social life? The sense of unreality in modern Indian politics and the lack of discipline and well-ordered thought in many of our politicians have often attracted attention. Our politicians often behave like schoolboys—and spoilt ones at that—in their lack of a sense of discipline and responsibility. Have we tried to find out the cause of this phenomenon? To me it seems that they behave as schoolboys in politics, because as schoolboys they never took any interest in politics, not even the schoolboy politics which serves as the training-ground for future citizens and leaders in free and independent countries. Trial and error are the instruments through which life teaches us its most important lessons. It is better that the experiment of trial and error should occur in a sphere where error may not involve in disaster the fate and future of thousands of men and women. As social beings we cannot thus avoid politics; is it not better then that our mistakes in politics should occur in the restricted sphere of

student life where error will not bring in its train tragedy and disaster for millions?

Yet in a politically unfree country like ours, it is not strange that attempts should be made to divorce students from politics, for participation in politics inevitably breeds the attitude of criticism and enquiry. If this attitude grows from early youth, it is bound to undermine the basis of authority on which alone political domination can last. Properly understood, this is also the aim of education, for the purpose of education is acquisition and increase of knowledge and this requires curiosity and inquisitiveness. Students, if they are true to their vocation, must ask questions about everything, and must examine and criticize whatever comes to them in the garb of authority. Acceptance must be based, not on compulsion but intellectual conviction; and the moment such a mentality grows, the blind appeal to authority would go. With the rejection of authority and the growth of freedom of thought and mind, imperial domination would be imperilled. Education in imperial regimes is, therefore, based upon the idea of unquestioning acceptance. Freedom of thought and freedom of the intellect are definitely at a discount. Indian society based upon the conception of authority, and Indian religions emphasizing revelation and sanction tried to induce in the minds of young men reverence for status as immutable and unchanging. In consequence, the general policy of our education has always emphasized authority, not criticism—blind faith, not free and unfettered enquiry—and that is why our education has so often defeated its own purpose.

The revolt of our youth must, therefore, be more fundamental and far-reaching than that of youth in other countries. They fight a political or social system, but here our fight is against the accumulated tradition that is in our blood itself. We have to learn anew the distinction between non-conformity and disrespect. Difference of opinion is here regarded as disobedience and very often our elders demand our acquiescence, not because of the reasonableness of what they say but just because it is they who say it. Against this blind acceptance of authority, a new mentality of defiance has grown in recent years. A new spirit of criticism is surging throughout the land. To the older generation and persons in power, rejection of authority is tantamount to turbulence and mere indiscipline. Turbulence and indiscipline there may be, at times, but it is only to be expected as a reaction from the blind acceptance of the past. But shall we, because of occasional excesses, forget that the so-called indiscipline of the students of today is only the emergence of a new consciousness and of the urge towards the eradication of the evils from which society suffers today? The question which I want to ask is a somewhat different one. The spirit of criticism is here today but does this criticism go far enough and deep enough? Do we merely talk of criticism and accept blindly social customs which are out of keeping with the spirit of the times? Do we look at society and government, at education and religion, at rights and duties with the eyes of questioning, critical, rebellious, revolutionary youth? Or do we merely luxuriate in a vague emotional satisfaction of the spirit of enquiry and allow it to degenerate into a mere intellectual pastime?

This raises the question of discipline in student life. We have seen that students cannot avoid politics even if they want to, and also that they should not even if they could. But at the same time, they must remember that if they exhaust themselves in the demands of day-to-day politics, if they do not diligently prepare themselves for the future when the task of guiding the destinies of their people will be theirs, they shall have to answer to future generations for their failure. Politics today is a matter of complex calculations and wide familiarity with the history of many countries and races. If in the impulse of the moment the student forgets that action must be based on theory, that statesmanship is the result of much experience and thought, how will he shoulder the responsibility when his own turn comes?

Besides, impulse, however powerful it may be, can never lead to success unless there is behind it a cold and calculating brain. Mrs Naidu told you yesterday of Kemal Ataturk and told you that the secret of his success lay in the combination of enthusiasm and discipline, impulse and order, fervour and iron control. Often in our country we hear it said that there is no time for thought during a conflagration, but those who say it forget that it is then that thought is most necessary. How to husband our resources—how to save what we can from the destruction which will otherwise overtake all we have? Mere running about does not put out a fire, nor is the enthusiasm of a child of much help there. There must be true discipline and control, volunteers must line up and work in co-operation to fight the flames. This control, this discipline makes a fire brigade of a dozen men of far greater

value than a mob of twelve hundred; it is again this discipline that makes a small handful of soldiers prevail against the fury and the onslaught of infuriated mobs. That is why the student movement in India and elsewhere, while it keeps in close contact with politics, must also remember that it must not waste its energies, it must not squander the substance of its soul in merely achieving the momentary, in meeting those demands which at the moment seem important but dwindle into insignificance before the day is out.

Such abandon, such wild enthusiasm could perhaps be understood if it flamed up and solved once and for all the problems of the world. If you could be sure that a conflagration would never repeat itself, perhaps you could justify everyone making one supreme effort to master it. But what about a fire that is eternal and must burn so long as man is man? The problems of politics are not such that you may solve them here and now: they are problems inherent in the nature of man himself. Like men who live by the sea and fight its might day in and day out, year in and year out, we stand by the shores of human destiny. Would it do for the dwellers by the sea to exhaust the energies of all, men and women, boys and girls and even infants, in making one supreme effort? They must garner their resources, they must prepare to carry on the fight till the end of time. For us, the solution of one political problem will create a hundred new ones. The destruction of British imperialism will only open the path to new effort and new endeavour, to the solution of the problem of rehabilitating Indian life, which is far more stupendous, far more arduous than fighting a

foreign enemy. For that future task, students must conserve their strength, their enthusiasm, their discipline and their faith.

There is another thing we must never forget. Youth is not a function of physical age alone, for there are young men whose minds have already ossified with the weight of ages and there are men, old as years go, whose vitality, whose spirit of enquiry and constant adventure into new modes of life have led them to new discoveries and new realizations of truth. Shall we forget that Immanuel Kant, often regarded as a typical pedantic philosopher, formulated his transcendental theories at an age when most men think of retiring from the struggle of life? Shall we forget that Karl Marx, when he worked out his revolutionary theories in politics, economics and philosophy, was a man well past his prime? Coming nearer home, can we forget that we have among us today Mrs Sarojini Naidu who seems to grow younger with every passing year? Youth, we must confess, is a quality of the mind, not of mere physical age.

The spirit of criticism in the young men of today is then a happy sign. It indicates an awakening from the torpor and lassitude of spirit from which we in India have suffered for ages. But to revive the question I have already asked, does our criticism go far enough? Are we aware of the nature of the problems which cry for a solution and will not wait? Do our minds revolt against the injustice of the social and political system which in our country keeps nine men out of every ten illiterate and ignorant? Agriculture is the foremost industry of the country and yet hardly eighty rupees per annum for

every thousand of the population is spent on it against the thousands spent in primarily industrial lands like America and Great Britain. How many of us care to know these facts, and of those who know, how many pause to think of the reasons for such an absurd disparity? Even in the matter of life and death of the people, do we realize why it is that men of our country live for hardly thirty years, when the average expectation of life in England is fifty-four years or more?

We look at the injustices of our social system and see a spectacle of appalling stupidity. We break the heads of men in order to save the heads of cows. But the same spectacle of stupidity, though with local variations and difference in degree, meets our eyes when we look at the world outside. Everywhere in the world, social extravagance and conspicuous waste lead to social frustration and unhappiness. One man toils and another enjoys the fruit of his labour. One is overwhelmed with abundance and knows not what to do with his superfluity while another struggles for a bare subsistence and cannot find it. Can social stupidity go further than what we find in modern capitalistic civilization, if civilization it can be called, where millions go hungry and yet thousands of tons of wheat are burnt in order to secure a sufficient margin of profit to those who already roll in wealth? Thousands lack clothing, and men and women have nothing to cover their nakedness, and yet factories are closed and millions of workers sit idle and unemployed. Do we search in our hearts to find whence results this tremendous wastage of human material with all its acquired efficiency and skill? Man's wants are legion but

the conquest of the powers of nature has placed in our hands the key to their satisfaction, and yet social stupidity and social inertia will not allow a solution in which every human being may find a fruitful and happy life.

Our ingrained habits of thought and life are startled and disturbed when these questions are raised. The spectres of socialism and communism haunt our imagination, and we think that to talk of organizing the resources of society in the interest of society is to open the door for these to walk in. But how to conceal the fact that every one of us wants organization when it suits one's own purpose? The millowner wants that the State through its organization and machinery should protect him from the demands that his labourers make, or better still, so organize the life and training of the labourers that they may not think about undesirable questions like a human standard of life at all. During the height of *laissez-faire*, millowners fought for the maintenance of laws that guaranteed the freedom of young workers, boys and girls of twelve or less, to work for sixteen hours a day for six days in the week. Do not the landlords of our country want such social and political organization as will guarantee to them the privileges they have usurped and want to pass as rights inherent in their status? Is not the very demand for the maintenance of the *status quo*— whether it be with respect to caste among Hindus, purdah among Muslim women or imperial domination by the British—a demand for organization of society in a particular way? Is not the recent phenomenon of fascist organization of society in the interests of capitalism in itself a recognition of the urgency of organization and an attempt to

prostitute it in the interests of finance capital? In a word, does not all objection to social organization and social control in the end boil down simply to an objection to organization in which social interests are exalted instead of the personal interests of the exploiting classes in society?

We often hear of the problem of unemployment today, but in our country at least, we mean by it only the problem of unemployment among the educated middle classes. This attempt to divide the problem of unemployment itself shows our secret sympathies, for how can one who really thinks of society as an organism refuse to think of the unemployment or under-employment of agriculturists and labourers? The essence of unemployment is the inability of society to utilize the different social units. It is immaterial whether these units are educated or uneducated, belong to the middle or the working classes. I would here draw your attention to the curious fact that if you really believe in *laissez-faire*, if you really think that social control should not operate on the lives of the members of society, you have no right to worry about the problem of the educated unemployed at all. I have already referred to the anarchy which prevails in the fields of industry and commerce. Men go without the essentials of life and yet luxuries are produced in a constantly increasing stream. Iron and steel works in England were closing down, textile factories were shut, but the liquor and motion picture industries flourished even during the darkest days of economic depression. Uncontrolled and suicidal competition goes on in these fields, and if you hesitate to apply social control there and determine in what ways the energies and the resources of the community should be used, you

must in all logic refrain from interfering in the question of unemployment among the educated middle classes. You must, in order to be consistent, say that it is a matter for individual concern as to who finds employment and who does not and the State can or ought to interfere in it no more than in the governance of industry.

But not the most hardened capitalist or imperialist dare say so. Not the most fanatical upholder of individualistic anarchy in the economic and political field dare say that society has no responsibility towards the individual and his happiness. England dare not suspend her unemployment benefit even if she wants to and even Fascist Germany must provide winter relief to those who cannot provide for themselves. America with all her individualism must yet think of New Deals and other methods to soften the rigours of unemployment among her workers. The moment this fact is realized, there is no way of denying the supreme importance of social control and the only question becomes: 'In whose interest should society be controlled—in the interest of a handful of those who enjoy all the good things of life or of those whose history till now has been one unrelieved record of service and suffering?' With the idea of social control comes the prospect of a society in which each man may have a function and a purpose in life.

In the anarchic world of today, there are men who can and do spend millions to satisfy a moment's whim and there are millions who have not the means for maintaining even a merely animal life. Unsatisfied wants face unemployed labour and unused intellect and skill. Pool them together under the control of society and in the

social interest, and there will be neither poverty nor nakedness. According to official and semi-official estimates, in India alone seven crores of men and women live on the verge of perpetual starvation and another fourteen crores live permanently on half rations. If these twenty-one crores of men and women consumed an additional handful of rice per day, think of the profound social consequences. The demand for food will increase manifold, prices of agricultural commodities will go up and thousands will find employment in a rehabilitated agriculture. If these twenty-one crores of men and women could afford proper clothing—for without proper food, how can they even think of covering their nakedness—the demand they would create would provide work not only for all the mills of India but also for those of Lancashire, and perhaps even then, without further development of the industry the demand could not be met. If this vast mass of humanity, living a famished, hungry and naked life, received proper medical attention, if the terrible infant and maternal mortality among them were sought to be checked, if proper educational facilities were brought to them, a demand would be created for thousands of doctors and nurses, thousands of hospitals and pharmacies, thousands of teachers and schoolmasters and writers and libraries, and employment would be created for millions of men and women. And the exploited and the hungry are not to be found in India alone. Their number is legion in China and Central Asia, in the depths of Africa and even in the heart of the so-called civilized countries like England, France and America. The exploited all over the world constitute the vast majority and it is one of the wonders

of history that they have not seen through the exploitation from which they suffer and risen in revolt to create a new order and a new society out of the ruins of the old.

We live today in a world where civilization and culture are faced with imminent disaster. Conflicting ideas confuse our minds and the prospect of a collapse of world civilization haunts our imagination. The conquest of nature has placed infinite resources at our disposal, and yet in the midst of plenty men and women go hungry and naked. War under modern conditions has become a danger not only to the attacked but also to the attacker, and yet in spite of the certainty of universal destruction, nations think and act in terms of war alone. In a word, we live in a world which seems to have gone mad and where men and women act out of a combination of distraction, fear and perplexity.

In this mad world of today, it is inevitable that young men must think afresh of their fate and their future. Those who have seen better days and lived in more prosperous times may have memories which bring faith and courage to them, but what of those whose future is still before them? What prospects do they have and what can they hope for? Politics has, therefore, become the life-blood of young men and women all over the world, and the spirit of enquiry and restlessness is only one manifestation of their troubled searching after an uncertain future.

It is not without significance that the student movement developed in its present form and intensity in the post-war years. Not that students in the past have not taken part in the revolutionary upsurge of the peoples of the world.

They were, as young men, in the vanguard of the American War of Independence and in the revolutionary struggles of eighteenth-century France. But though they fought and struggled and suffered in such revolutions, they had not done so as a conscious student body. It was the Great War that made them self-conscious and forged the great movement of which you here form a part.

The Great War came as a great shock and a liberator of the spirit. Everywhere young men were told that they were fighting for honour and truth, for justice and liberty, for the right of self-determination of nations and the value of the plighted word. Everywhere people believed that this was a war to end war, that they were fighting for self-defence against unjust and unjustified aggression, and yet when the war ended, they found a peace imposed which ended even the hope of peace.

During the anxious years of the war and ever since, these questions have troubled the consciousness of young men everywhere. If every one wanted peace, how could there be the hideousness of war? If every one wanted justice and was prepared to render justice to others, why this horrible nightmare through which the world is passing even today? Through searching of heart and the discipline of suffering, young men all over the world learnt the bitter lesson. They realized that conflict was born of repression and injustice, that war was caused by the desire of one nation to conquer and subjugate another, and the motive of domination could only be found in the desire for economic and other exploitation. One nation desired to exploit the resources of another and thus increase its wealth, but it could do this only if it had political control

over the other. Thus empires are built for the purpose of creating, capturing and retaining markets, and contrarily, conquered countries find that they can never solve the problems of poverty and frustration without first achieving political freedom. National glory and imperial pride may have contributed to the wars of peoples, but the fundamental cause behind such manifestations is economic. Markets for one's produce and the desire to maintain a higher standard of life at the cost of less fortunate races have caused more wars and more misery than any other factor in human history.

Suppressed nationalities struggle for independence, for without independence they cannot realize their own potentialities. Conquering nations resist that claim, for once these achieve their independence, there will be no possibility of exploiting them. Hence, exploitation and resistance to it supply the central core round which conflicts rage and the bitterest struggles are fought, though high-sounding phrases and ideas are used to cover the nakedness of such exploitation.

But there is a fundamental contradiction in such imperial exploitation. The classes which enjoy the fruits of empire have to delude their less fortunate countrymen and this they can do only by playing on their national vanity. Emphasis upon national dignity inevitably evokes a reaction in the conquered nation, and develops a sense of nationality there. Soon the two nationalities face each other and a conflict becomes inevitable. Not only this, but imperialist exploitation tends to raise the standard of life in the dominating country. Costs of production go up and finance capital seeks new fields of expansion and

exploitation in the backward countries. New capitalism thus develops and soon the two capitalisms engage in a mortal fight. In a word, where there is imperialism there must be war, and where there is capitalism there must be imperialism, whatever the disguise it may adopt to hide its real nature.

Freedom is, therefore, the first principle of the student movement of the world. Young men all the world over realize that there can be no peace, and therefore no progress, till freedom is realized for every nationality in the world. But this freedom cannot and does not mean mere political freedom. If the history of nineteenth-century Europe has taught us anything, it has taught us that political liberty without economic equality is a mere mockery. Political democracy is meaningless without economic and social equality, and history has further taught us that economic and social equality cannot be achieved except in terms of a classless society from which the motive of private acquisition and profit has been eliminated. The freedom for which the student movement stands is freedom in the political, the economic and the social field; for it is only on the basis of such freedom that the structure of peace and progress can be built. That is why the student movement has adopted freedom, peace and progress as its motto, and made freedom the basis of peace and progress.

In India today the identical problem faces us. Without the achievement of freedom, we cannot realize our inmost purposes and that is why the student movement has linked itself to the struggle for political independence. But that is only the beginning of our endeavours. Once

political independence is achieved and the problem of poverty faced, new perspectives open out before us and the student movement must be equally alive to them. Other politically free countries have not solved their unemployment problem. They have not solved the problem of social inequality and injustice. How can we then hope that by the mere achievement of political liberty we can solve them in India?

The student movement must. therefore, act in terms of realizing political liberty in India, but it must think and dream in terms of a new order of society in which the accidents of birth and wealth shall not blind our vision to the fundamental solidarity and brotherhood of all mankind. The very existence of society is evidence of man's interdependence and in the modern world, where space and time are continually shrinking, there can be no stability, no freedom, no peace or progress unless we can achieve them for the whole of mankind.

Therefore, we must work for achieving them within society by altering the basis of the relationship of individual to individual, and we must also work to make them the guiding principles of the relation of community to community, of race to race. Complete economic, political and social freedom of the individual and the race must be the guarantee of world peace and world progress.

November 1938

VIII. EDUCATION AND THE SOCIAL ORDER

It is about education and the social order, of social significance and the role of an active student organization that I want to speak to you today. Often we are told that the student must live detached from the turmoils of the world; he must not entangle himself in the stress and struggle of daily life but live in a palace of learning unsullied by contact with the work-a-day world. But these injunctions, however well intentioned, strike at the root of the organic unity of life and as such are bound to fail. The student must also live in this world and cannot avoid the consequences of decisions taken on the plane of politics. In Spain and China, students are affected as much as any one else by what is happening every day, and in Germany and Japan students must carry out orders like any one else. As a member of society and a citizen of a particular State, he cannot, even if he wills, deny or ignore the claims which that society or State may make on him. All dreams of beautiful isolation are shattered upon the rock of social solidarity and social membership.

The inherent laziness of human nature often tends to make us forget this fact and try to ignore the outer world. The student, like others, is neither consciously nor consistently a political animal. The world that is most important to him is the world that he has built up round his own experiences. He generally thinks, not socially nor politically, but in terms of his individual happiness or misery, and lets the affairs of the world pass unheeded by

till suddenly its impact makes him realize that, however much he may try, he cannot live apart from it and that his good is inextricably tied up with its good. With a shock he realizes that he cannot mind his own affairs unless he minds the affairs of the world as well. He may try to avoid politics, but will politics avoid him?

Into every aspect of our life, society and politics enter and determine its tone and texture. Politics determines the pattern of our education and sets the limits within which alone we can operate. It even attempts to mould our character and shape our thoughts. Students are as much subject to these laws as anybody else and hence an interest in politics is as much their right as it is their duty. If politics cannot be avoided, is it not much better that it should be faced consciously and intelligently, and with a full understanding of what it involves?

That is why the student movement everywhere has become entangled with politics and its manifold manifestations. The entanglement has varied in different countries in accordance with their varying needs and circumstances. In England, a satisfied country till recently, students have been content to play with politics in a sphere of their own which has reflected but not constituted the real politics of the land. Unions at Oxford and Cambridge and other British Universities have played with political ideas, discussed them and debated on them, but generally maintained an element of unreality and detachment in such discussions. In less fortunate countries, the pretence has turned into reality, the intellectual fervour has hardened into grim earnestness. And in a country like India, where political enslavement is the dominant fact of our lives,

students have found it impossible to keep away from the fight for independence when it challenged all that was finest and noblest in them. In India, the danger to the student movement is not from its intellectual aloofness and sterility, but from its absorption and the consequent obsession and exhaustion in political strife.

Yet even this obsession is easy to understand. For, till recently, the tradition of education in India has been based upon authority and unquestioning acceptance, upon a sharp divorce from the realities of Indian life and an absorption in dreams of officialdom and bureaucratic splendour. A spirit of criticism and imperialistic domination cannot flourish together and education in India has, therefore, aimed at quenching the spirit of enquiry in order to maintain the foreign domination intact. It little mattered that this process also resulted in the stultification of education itself, for education, in the true sense of the term, expands the mind and gives resilience to the intellect. Inquisitiveness and curiosity are the bases on which alone knowledge can grow, and inquisitiveness and curiosity cannot flourish in an atmosphere oppressive with a spirit of domination and circumscribed by narrow material ends. That is why we find that the number of literates here does not mark the measure of education achieved. That is why in our country more than in others we find men who have received all the externals of a high intellectual culture and yet whose minds are encumbered with blind superstitions and effete traditions, with the shabby furnishings of beliefs that are the relics of a vanished past.

Today with the resurgence of Indian national consciousness, a new spirit of enquiry and revolt possesses the mind of Indian youth. Nothing is sacrosanct today, nothing above question. And the absorption of the Indian student movement in the political struggle is at the same time a symptom and an effect of this newfound freedom of the spirit. Excess there may be in such expression, for that is only natural in the reaction from its studied aloofness in the past from politics and all other things that are of vital importance in life. But the task of the student movement today is to harness the forces that have been released, to canalize them in fruitful and purposive activity, and to prevent disruption and waste by mere display of emotional abandon and frenzy. And this it is particularly important to remember in a country where enthusiasm flares up to lyric heights and then collapses with equal suddenness. Sustained effort, calculated and enduring passion are qualities that we have lacked. Indian religions and societies have exalted the utter abandon of asceticism where one act of renunciation wipes out all the manifold evils accumulated through long years of lethargy and lassitude. The earnestness of moral endeavour which struggles through unexciting days and months and years to build a concrete habitation of life with many mansions and many aspects has not had for us the appeal of the lyric intensity and exquisiteness of an individual decision. In a word, our life has lacked discipline and order. That is why stately empires reared by magnificent individual effort have collapsed with the deterioration in the quality of the individuals inheriting them. Organization and decentralization are facts which

we have not understood and do not understand even today. We have lacked in social consciousness, and this failure has stamped with impermanence all our endeavour to build a better India. The function of the student movement is to awaken in our young men and women a consciousness of social order and organization, a feeling for social significance which may enable them to succeed where we have till now invariably failed.

I should like to express the same thing in another way and say that the problem of the student movement in India is to steer a middle course between the two alternatives of unquestioning acquiescence to authority and anarchic assertion of individuality. Students cannot avoid politics even if they would, and there are a hundred reasons why they should not even if they could. On the other hand, for students to be obsessed by politics and allow their energies to be dissipated by the demand of current events constitutes an equal danger to their future and the future of the country. Avoidance of politics breeds a spirit of acquiescence in which the will to better the world is lost. Obsession with politics engenders a spirit of revolt in which each individual tends to constitute himself into the final judge of every question of society and State. Blind conformity to a general law is as much a danger as blind uniformity in self-assertion. One kills the spirit of enquiry the other tends to dissolve society itself. And this is all the more necessary to remember in a world where the intimate interlacing of social, economic and political factors has made the business of human affairs far more complicated than it has ever been before. Politics today is a matter of detailed knowledge of the history and

geography of many lands, of familiarity with the structure and interaction of social and economic life not only in one's own country but in all the world. How can one determine one's course of action in the midst of the shifting sands of everyday happenings unless one has in one's mind a clear conception of the course of events in history? How can we meet the challenge of experience's eternal novelty unless the record of human evolution, in theory and practice, in ideals and achievements, serves as a pointer to the path that mankind has trod and must tread evermore in its yearning after the ideal?

This knowledge can be built up only by painstaking care and arduous work, in a word by a hard discipline in which youth's inevitable tendency towards fervid and flamboyant expression is constantly checked. Politics, which under modern conditions has become the life-blood of youngmen all over the world, demands all their passion, all their devotion and all their energy. But in order to ensure that they can express their passion, utilize their energy and satisfy their devotion, it is essential that they must submit themselves to rigid discipline and self-control. This must be a discipline which they impose upon themselves, for an external imposition only serves to curb their spontaneity. The spirit of enquiry is equally the condition of successful acquisition of knowledge and of significant issue in political activity, but it must be a spirit that obeys definite laws and possesses definite objectives.

Discipline and self-control must therefore be the key-note of the student movement, and specially in India. Nowhere is this more necessary than in the sphere of

politics. A wise general is he who marshals his forces with meticulous care and refuses to lose one man more than is absolutely necessary. But in our country this is often forgotten and we try to make up by mass what we lack in quality. That is why it is possible for some leaders here to say that the student must throw himself into the vortex of politics and let the future take care of itself. They do not see, or perhaps do not care to see, that undisciplined frenzy or enthusiasm does not achieve its object. Even during a conflagration, we can best fight the fires with an organized and disciplined force. Children and infants can only be an encumbrance and their participation only adds to the chaos. Fires must be fought, and that can best be done under the leadership of a cool and balanced brain that organizes and controls the forces at his disposal.

Nor is this all. If we could be sure that once the fires are mastered, they would never recur, there would be some justification for making a supreme effort and concentrating every ounce of energy in putting out the flames. Who can have that assurance in the affairs of man? Who dares to put a limit to man's aspiration and endeavour? Man continually marches forward to new adventures and new achievements; each new achievement is a challenge to a fresh adventure, and there can never be a goal beyond which man cannot go. In a word, struggle shall be the law of human life so long as man is man. Young men in every age must dream new dreams to shape the world nearer to their hearts' desire. The crisis which is a permanent feature of the economic structure of the modern world may, and perhaps must, disappear with the

elimination of the profit motive from society; but, when the causes of the present discontent and conflict are no more, who knows what new dreams the revolutionaries of that new order will dream for further transformation of society and human relationships?

In the field of politics, we must therefore live dangerously, for only by so living can we hope to secure the conditions of peace and stability for the world. Consider the long way which man has already travelled in that path. From the isolated individual living the life of impulse and instinct to the well-ordered family where reciprocal rights and duties are recognized and honoured—it is already a long step. From the family to the clan and the tribe, and onwards to the nation mark further revolutionary changes in social consciousness and outlook. It is a matter of history how only a few centuries ago, feudal factions fought in Europe to assert their sectional rights and how absolute monarchy—at first sight a thing of evil—evolved to co-ordinate and harmonize the fighting factions. Today we are still struggling in the stage of absolute nation-states—whether authoritarian or democratic—but already the organization of the world has marched beyond that stage, and transformed the warring nations into members of a world community. Nations may not recognize the fact, but who can deny that the political and economic ills of the modern world transcend all national and territorial boundaries?

We must therefore live dangerously, for, to think of the future in the midst of the conditions of the present is always dangerous; it is the quintessence of revolution. But the quality of danger in our lives must be, not that

which attaches to sudden conflagration or calamity, but that which is the constant companion of men who live on the shores of the sea and must wage an incessant fight to resist its constant threat. In such a struggle, there is no occasion for bravado or sudden frenzied outburst; what we require is steady persistence and silent endeavour—organized effort that is the more successful because of its lack of effervescence and fervid dissipation.

I shall site a few concrete examples where we require this fusion of revolutionary impulse with steady self-control. The urgency of our fight for freedom is accepted by everyone who has any political consciousness, but do we always realize the necessity of discipline and organization in that fight? The good is the enemy of the best no doubt, but in our country, the best has unfortunately become the enemy of the good. A mentality has grown that looks at political and social questions, not from the point of view of the realities of the world, but through the distorting medium of a visionary doctrinairism. This attitude will never temporize even when temporizing may be necessary for the achievement of our ends. Just as Russia had to modify the idea of immediate world-revolution in order to consolidate Revolution in Russia itself, we also may find it necessary to call a halt at times and consolidate what we have already achieved. Those who will not allow us that breathing-space and want to rush to the goal in one frenzied breathless spurt, may end by spending the energy of our revolt long before we have attained our goal.

Political independence we must achieve for recovering our moral and intellectual integrity, for making our education real and vital and for realizing the tremendous

economic possibilities of our land. That independence is today our immediate objective and for that purpose we must consolidate the energy of the student, the peasant and the labourer. But have we considered seriously what we shall do after the goal has been reached? Nor can we say today that the time for consideration will come after the objective has been gained, for I am sure you will all agree the success in that limited objective is perhaps not very distant. Already there are symptoms that soon, perhaps sooner than many of us dare to hope, India will be free. World forces and the process of events are hurrying towards that consummation. But the young men of our country must ask today: Would this by itself resolve the problems implicit in our lives?

Without the achievement of political freedom, we cannot attain our inmost purpose, and that is why the student movement has linked itself to the struggle for political independence. But by the same argument, this marks only the beginning of our endeavour. Once political independence is achieved, the problems of hunger, poverty and social inequality must be faced. Other politically free countries have not solved the problem of unemployment. They have not solved the problem of social inequality and injustice. How can we be confident of success where they have failed unless we apply fresh measures to the remedy of our common ills? Can we hope to achieve and retain political liberty without also eradicating the economic and social inequalities from which human society has suffered since the beginning of recorded history?

I shall take another sphere where revolutionary reconstruction must be based upon a fusion of enthusiasm and

discipline. Our educational system has often been condemned, and with justice, for its many inherent defects. It aims not at education, not at the development of personality and the liberation of the mind, but at the injection of information that too often remains dead and alien. It destroys originality, and in the name of intellectuality, kills the intellect. We have lost our manual skill and gained nothing in recompense. The construction of education must therefore start from the very basis if it is to be of value in our national life. Not only must its tone and temper change, but also its range and extent. In the past, and even today, education has been only for the privileged few and has aimed at creating a *bourgeoisie* who may help to distribute British goods in India and also to maintain the conditions necessary for the purpose. The manufacture of clerks—for government offices or mercantile concerns—has been its aim, and it has succeeded ingloriously. The intellectuals have become sterile and useless. The masses, divorced from contact with the vital forces of the world, have become inert and dead. A new scheme of education to replace this effete and often harmful system must have three main objectives. First, it must be an education that is accessible to all and acceptable to all. Meant for all, it must be based on what is common to the culture of India, and avoid what is peculiar to any special group or community. It must aim at a universal ethic and avoid all religious colouring. Secondly, it must develop the spirit of spontaneity and freedom in the mind of India's youth. Our present system of education has sinned the most in this respect and it is in this respect that the greatest expiation must be made.

Questioning, not acceptance—enquiry, not authority must mark the new system we want to evolve. This end can be achieved only if we free ourselves from the tyranny of an alien tongue. Memory, not intelligence, is the basis of our education today, for the energy of the young is exhausted in the mere effort of mastering the intricacies of the language. The medium of instruction has become more important than the instruction itself, with consequences which every thinking man deplores. Thirdly, a new system of education must aim at bringing back the manual skill we have lost, for if India is to grow machine-minded, as she must under the stress of modern conditions, she must create a vast reservoir of human material from which she can draw her technicians and engineers, her skilled workers and efficient operatives. Without this reorientation of her educational policy and a shifting of emphasis from purely literary aims to one which achieves a harmony of physical and mental culture, there can be no hope for education in India.

Recently there has been such an attempt at reorienting education in India. Judged from these standards, the Wardha scheme marks a step forward in the right direction, though in the opinion of many, it does not go far enough. We must aim at a scheme which guarantees free education to everybody, not up to the age of ten or twelve or even fourteen but so long as a student can derive benefit from it. In the modern world of individual anarchy, education also is looked upon from the point of view of the individual's struggle against his fellows. This is one of the greatest social losses which human stupidity permits, for the wastage of human material

through lack of opportunities results in the impoverishment of the quality of life. Besides, one of the most potent instruments for the maintenance and increase of the inequalities inherent in modern society is the system of education prevalent now, for it puts a premium on wealth and social status and exaggerates the initial disadvantage from which the vast majority of the members of our society suffer. In a partial, but only a very partial attempt to remedy this in the lower stages of education, the Wardha scheme is a right and necessary move. But the proposal to make higher and technical education a matter of private concern for the individual or the group is an undesirable and reactionary feature which must be discarded at the earliest opportunity. The attempt to emphasize manual skill is also a welcome shift in the tendency of education today, though the utility of the move will be largely governed by the choice of the type of manual skill imparted to the children brought under its influence.

I do not want to dilate upon the quarrel about the names of the schools started under this scheme. Vidya Mandir or Bait-ul-Ilm, to me they seem equally a sign of retrogression and can be explained only by the confusion of renaissance with revivalism which is so marked a feature of Indian life today. Anybody with any political foresight could predict that in a country like ours, where community glares at community in suspicion, it is a positive danger to import fresh religious elements into the common life of society. Public education here should be secular, for any attempt to invoke religious associations will lead to fresh causes for quarrel and further exacerbation

of feelings. We often talk of Kemal Ataturk and admire what he did for Turkey. But do we seriously try to apply the principles which he found of use in Turkey to the remedy of our ills? If there be nothing special in these names, why insist upon them? If on the other hand they have a meaning, this meaning is bound to derive its importance from specific religious associations and should for the sake of India's future growth be eschewed. Call a school a school and let us be done with it.

The question of Urdu *versus* Hindi is to my mind another such exhibition of confusion between renaissance and revivalism. If we want a common language for India—and who does not?—it must perforce be Hindustani; not the rich and luxuriant Urdu which a Lucknowite may display nor the sonorous Hindi which is the delight of the pundits of Benares, but the Hindustani of the market-place which you and I speak and understand. And I am equally convinced that the only way of achieving this Hindustani is to adopt the Roman script—the international script of the modern world—so that at one stroke we make Hindustani accessible not only to the whole of India, but to the peoples of the world as a whole. I have no doubt in my mind that when we have taken this single but revolutionary step and made it possible for the whole of India to contribute to the enrichment of Hindustani, it will become one of the major languages of the world. Till this is done, religious and regional, communal and linguistic bickerings will continue.

Revolutionary ardour and disciplined sense must co-operate in this endeavour. National vanity may at first be injured, though there is no reason why it should. For

any script is an artificial set of symbols which have little to do with a nation's genius. We must realize that the language is not the script. The language we may imbibe with our mothers' milk but the script we painfully and laboriously acquire with tears and toil. Besides, it is only a perverted inferiority complex that prevents our adopting what may be good in other cultures and other civilizations. A virile nation, an alive people never hesitates to borrow, adopt and adapt, for it assimilates whatever it acquires. But a subject race continually hesitates and pauses lest a breath of air from the free and wide world outside sully its artificially preserved purity.

There are a hundred other questions which I would like to discuss with you. But I must tax your patience no more. I shall, in concluding, once again appeal to you to achieve this intellectual emancipation, this freedom of the mind in your own lives. The society in which we are born seeks to tie us with a hundred bonds. Superstitions and beliefs are in our blood, and forms of economic and political organization seem to us like the unalterable facts of life. Today a new type of civilization is emerging into the range of possibility. The conquest of the forces of nature has for the first time made it possible to bring freedom and light into the life of every single human individual. Achieve for yourself intellectual freedom and the wealth of knowledge, and use all your intellect and all your passion and all your knowledge to build up an order of society in which the injustices of the prevalent regime may disappear, and we may realize the supreme principle of social good in giving to every one what he needs and taking

from everyone what he can contribute. Into that revolutionary adventure of tomorrow, I welcome you as fellow-workers, friends and comrades.

April 1939

IX. MUSLIMS, HINDUS AND BRITISH RULE

Mr President, Sir, I do not feel very happy in speaking on this motion and that for more reasons than one. First of all, I do not see any point in presenting an Address to His Excellency the Governor requesting him that the differences between the communities should be made up. Here I propose to undertake a brief historical analysis and go back into the past history of the country for the last 150 years and more, and if, in the course of my remarks, I say certain things which appear unpleasant to some of my Hindu and Muslim and European friends, I hope they will take my remarks in the spirit in which they are offered. It is not my desire to speak from an emotional or partisan point of view. But I think that a calm and dispassionate survey of the facts of Indian history for the last 150 years will convince us that this sort of appeal to the authorities that the differences between the two communities should be made up is, to say the very least, inapt and inappropriate. It is, after all, not the business of the Britishers in this country to make up the differences between the Hindus and Muslims, for, if they did so, their occupation in India would be gone. Ever since the time of Rome it has been the policy of every imperialist government to divide and rule, and if that very policy has been followed in this country as well it is a reflection not upon the Europeans who have utilized that principle here, but only upon those Hindus and Muslims who have lent themselves to be used and made fools of by persons who are more astute, have greater

political consciousness and patriotism and greater regard for the interests of their own country.

I am also not very happy with this resolution for one or two other reasons. In it, there is the talk about the 'rising tide of communalism'. That I think is not historically true. There is no question of a 'rising tide' of communalism. As a matter of fact, communal differences have been there as a canker in Indian polity only from the beginnings of the modern period; and if that canker had not been there, we should not have been in the state in which we are today. I think it is futile for us to go and appeal to a third party, which only profits by our differences and divergences; we should ourselves see that the canker is removed.

As I was saying a moment ago, it has been the policy of imperialist politics to divide those who are under its control, and in pursuance of that policy, the British Government in this country, ever since the day the Britishers came into contact with Indians, have set up the Hindu against the Muslim, and the Muslim against the Hindu. Before the government of this country was assumed by the British Parliament, even during the days of the East India Company, we can find definite traces of attempts made to set up one community against the other. If we survey the history of the last 150 years, two broad divisions show themselves very clearly. I would fix the first period from 1793 to 1886, and this I suggest is the period when the Britishers were pushing forward the Hindus in every possible way and trying to set them up as rivals against the Muslims who dominated at the time. There is no denying the fact that when the British took over

control, they did so from the hands of the Muslims, and for that reason it was in the interests of the Britishers that the Muslims must be crushed and their aspirations for political independence curbed, and in order to do that it was necessary that another force or party should be created in the country, which would be a sufficient off-set to the Muslim community of the time.

As the first step in this process of the gradual exaltation of the Hindus under the aegis of the British, I regard the Permanent Settlement in Bengal. There are economic, historical, psychological and social reasons for the Permanent Settlement, but most important of all, there was at the time also the definite political reason that the Permanent Settlement must exist in order to crush the Muslim aristocracy of the day. It marks the first step of a definite conscious policy which the British adopted in order to create a community whose interests were tied up with the interests of British Imperialism. It is also a historical fact that after the Permanent Settlement, practically 90 per cent of the land-owning classes lost their property, which passed into the hands of new owners, a new land-owning community who received this as a gift from the British. In many cases, this transference was not only to new persons but to persons of a different community. There is no denying the fact that before 1793, or at any rate a few decades earlier, the majority of land-owners were Muslims. But after 1793, we find that only a very few of them are Musalmans. The properties were transferred to the Hindus. This was natural, as it was in the interests of the Britishers to do so, and it reveals their political strategy.

The second step in this process of the exaltation of the Hindus at the cost of the Muslims, I regard to be the Resumption Proceedings. Honourable members of this House probably know how, as a result of the Resumption Proceedings, well-to-do Muslim families were reduced to poverty almost overnight. Some Hindus were also affected by them, but the brunt of the attack fell on the Muslims and that for reasons which are easy to understand. And what one Hindu lost went to another Hindu; while what the Muslim lost went invariably to a Hindu. This was the second step. The Muslim middle and upper classes were crushed and a new Hindu *bourgeoisie* or middle class created on its ruins.

The third step in this process was the famous Circular of Lord Macaulay of 1833, when almost overnight the language of the land was changed. Till 1833 the Muslims, at least in Bengal, did not realize that power had gone away from their hands; that the days of their glory were over. They flattered themselves with the idea, they deluded themselves with the idea, if I may say so, that the British were there merely as collectors of revenue, or Dewans. But after 1833, when overnight the language was changed and English became the Court language, that illusion of the Muslims was shattered, and shattered so suddenly and completely that they were not able to adapt themselves to the change in circumstances. The educational backwardness of the Muslims, from which they are suffering even today, is partly a result of this sudden change which took place in 1833. Therefore, I suggest that these three definite steps, namely, the Permanent Settlement of 1793, the Resumption Proceedings

which started in 1820 and Macaulay's famous Circular changing the Court language of India, mark the three different stages by which the Muslim upper and middle classes were denuded of their prestige and power, and in their place a new middle class was created, a Hindu middle class whose interests for the time being were identical with the interests of the British commercial classes who swayed the destinies of India.

Sir, there are other facts also which we have to remember. About that time, the major commercial concerns of the British were founded in Calcutta, and the middlemen in the commercial field also were naturally the Hindus. Because, at that time, by a futile but understandable attitude of non-co-operation which the Muslims had adopted, they refused to have anything whatsoever to do with the British, either politically or commercially. And as a result, the wealth of the country, and the culture of the country—for culture follows wealth—became concentrated in the hands of the Hindu middle classes of the period. Therefore, we find about that time, 1860 or thereabouts, a growing Hindu middle class which was opposed to the old Muslim rule and which thought in terms of the ideas which the Britishers of that time had taught. I may cite the late Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, whose great genius nobody questions, as one of the typical products of the period. He was one who condemned the the Muslim rule of the previous era and saw in the advent of the British the arrival of Dharmarajya. Bankim did not use the anger of the Hindus against Muslim rule as a symbol of the revolt of the oppressed against tyranny but allowed communal considerations to get entangled with

this universal and eternal conflict between power and tyranny on the one hand and oppressed nationalism on the other. We find, therefore, that in Bankim Chandra's *Ananda Math*—which even to this day, unfortunately, is almost a bible with many Hindu nationalists—a condemnation of Muslim rule—that there were many things to condemn there, nobody can question—and also, at the same time, the exaltation of the advent of the British. Satyananda's revolution was no longer necessary because of the establishment of Dharmarajya with the advent of the British!

There is nothing surprising in this, for this was only natural. The historic processes of the time, the economic factors and the political factors were working in the same direction, and we therefore find that a Hindu middle class was being created, step by step, by the British in order to overthrow the power of Muslims and in order to perpetuate their own domination over this country. But the British very soon learnt that power once transferred tends to assume undue proportions, and by the beginning of 1880 or thereabouts, we find that this Hindu middle class which had been created by the British, was demanding power, demanding political independence, was going much further than the British had ever intended them to go. The British had intended them to be merely middlemen, in the political field, in the commercial field, in the economic field, in the social field,—the purveyors of European ideas and civilization and sharers in the spoils of the Imperial Masters.

But the foundation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 marked the turn of the tide. The Hindu middle

class was going beyond the extent to which British Imperialism had wanted them to go, and when the Hindu *bourgeoisie*, the upper-class Hindus, wanted political independence, wanted full power and refused to be merely the middlemen of British Imperialism, the conflict between Hindu interests and British Imperialism began. Ever since 1885 this conflict has raged, and I think we are witnessing the same process going on to this day. The Hindu middle class has grown too powerful to be content to be merely the vassals of British Imperialism, to be merely the middlemen of British capitalism. That is why, ever since 1885, Hindus have always been in the vanguard of the national fight; they have carried the struggle for the freedom of India, they have carried the message of freedom for India, not only in this country but beyond the shores of India.

The British learnt a lesson. They saw that they had exalted the Hindu middle class more than was safe or necessary and ever since 1906 or so, we find a change in their policy to which eloquent reference has just now been made by my honourable friend Dr Radha Kumud Mookerji. There is no doubt that when the British Imperialists wanted to create a new Muslim middle class, the initiative for it came from British statesmen and the facts which have been mentioned by Dr Radha Kumud Mookerji have never been questioned. It is on record that it was largely due to the initiative of Lord Minto that this deputation was got up; and since that time it has been the policy of the British to try to create a new Muslim middle class in order to curb the power of the Hindu middle class. There is, however, one difference.

As a result of the experience of a hundred years, the British had learnt one lesson. They learnt that it does not do to give too much power to the middle class. Once power is given to the middle class, it is not content to remain a middle class: it wants to go on and achieve independence for the country. Therefore, from 1906, the old policy was changed and a new policy was started, by which a Muslim middle class was sought to be exalted over the Hindu middle class, but with a difference.

This time the British took good care that full power was not transferred to this new middle class. From 1793 to 1860, there is no doubt whatsoever that the British had really co-operated with the Hindus of the period. They had helped in creating a powerful middle class. But from 1906 onwards, when they were creating a Muslim middle class, nothing of the kind was done. Only the shadow of power was given, only an outward show of power was sought to be transferred, but the real kernel of power was kept reserved in the hands of the British. Again, as I have said earlier, there is in this no occasion for anger on the part of Indians. There may be occasion for sorrow, sorrow at the colossal inaptitude of a people who have allowed themselves to be exploited in this way for over 200 years. But if any Indian is offended or is angry with the Englishman, he is only proving his own foolishness and his own incompetence to take charge of the affairs of his country. But, as I was saying, since 1906 there has been a change in the policy. There has been a show of transfer of some power to the Muslim middle class, but with this difference that this time the British took good care that a sufficiently powerful Muslim middle class should not grow.

I think, Sir, we find evidence of this design in the Government of India Act of 1919, when real power was not transferred but power only in certain municipal affairs—you can call it a sort of glorified Calcutta Municipal Act—only control over certain Local Self-Government Departments was given. Certain departments which were given the high-sounding title of nation-building departments were handed over but without control over the finances and resources of the land. I will go still further and say that even in 1935 there is proof that the British had determined that real power was not given to the Hindu or the Muslim middle classes. Because, once the new Muslim middle class grew there may be co-operation between the Hindu middle class and the Muslim middle class, and if these two powers unite, there is no preventive to the demand for complete independence which the Indian people as a whole have put forward before the world time and again. Therefore, in 1935 what do we find? Again a glorified Local Self-Government Act.

What is even more significant is that defective as the Act was, the federal portion of the Act was not brought into operation from the outset. The two parts did not come into operation at the same time. This is a significant fact. I would ask every member of this House to pause over it, to consider it, to understand what are the implications of not giving even this very unsatisfactory Federation which every single Indian has condemned. The reasons for this are not far to seek, because in the Federal sphere, however imperfect the Federation that has been proposed, questions there are over which the interests of India cannot be divided: questions like

customs, tariff, control over the currency, commercial discrimination, defence and external relations, in which the interests of Indians are not and cannot be divided against one another. There is no question of Bengalee against Mahratta in the question of currency; there is no question of Hindu against Muslim in external relations; there is no question of Buddhist against Christian, no sort of communal differences, no sort of provincial differences in the questions which are the subjects for the Federal constitution. Even though this Federation in the form in which it has been given to us is unsatisfactory to every single individual Indian whatever his political complexion, whatever the party to which he belongs, still, even that Federation is not to be given till the pitch has been queered by creating provincial jealousy, by creating communal jealousy in the operation of Provincial Autonomy. Why is it that Provincial Autonomy was given first and not Federation, however imperfect it might have been? Because in the Provinces the quarrel will be between the Hindus and Muslims. In some provinces, the Government will be predominantly Hindu, in other provinces predominantly Muslim. Therefore, since the power will seem to be in the hands of the people of our country, since the conflict will seem to be one between different communities within the province, the relations between the communities will be disturbed, the relations between the provinces will be spoiled. When the Federation comes into operation, when the Federal part is put into effect, there will be provincial and communal jealousies, with the result that it will be very difficult for Indians to combine in the defence of their common interests. But in

spite of these difficulties, in spite of these dangers, Indians will unite in the Federal sphere as has been proved more than once. We find even in the present Central Assembly, the Muslim League and the Congress, in spite of sharp differences of opinion on so many questions, are forced to co-operate with one another on so many issues. That is why, Sir, at the very outset, I said that this is a resolution on which I feel very unhappy to speak. It is not a resolution which I can support wholeheartedly.

May 1939

X. ON JOINT AND SEPARATE ELECTORATES

Mr President, Sir, there is nothing so irritating as when a perfectly good case is spoiled by bad arguments. Sir, in connexion with the discussion and agitation that has been going on about this Bill, that has been my feeling on many occasions. There is a perfectly good case against this Bill. Because, apart from any other considerations, it is, if I may be permitted to use the term, a stupid Bill. But instead of calling it a stupid Bill, an unnecessary Bill, the attack on the Bill has been from a point of view which instead of doing any good to those who oppose the Bill, has only exacerbated the feeling between the communities, raised communal passions, and led to the creation of an atmosphere in which passion blinds the reason of men. Sir, I agree with a great deal of the sentiments of the honourable member who has just sat down, but I would only request him to go a little further along his own line of thought. Much of his analysis is quite true, but unfortunately he does not follow to the logical conclusion the line of his own reasoning. His criticism of Hindu leadership is right up to a point, but why does he stop there? Why does he not go a step further and say that the leadership of Muslims in India has been equally unfortunate?

Again, Sir, when he says that communalism in the true sense of the term is a good thing, I think there are few persons in this House or elsewhere who will disagree. It is not an easy thing to be a communalist, and it is unfortunate that in our country this is a much-abused, much-maligned

term. A real communalist is one who can subordinate his own selfish interests to the interests of his community. A real communalist is one who can identify himself with a community or a group, and in this way abandon and sacrifice his own personal interests and ambitions for the interests of a larger whole. Therefore, in European countries even to this day, the term communalist is a term of praise: a communalist is one who feels for the community. Unfortunately, I cannot agree with the honourable member when he thinks that in India there are too many communalists. There are few real communalists in India. There are self-seekers, there are selfish persons, and it is this confusion of selfish with communal interests, this mixing up of the idea of seeking one's own interest with the idea of seeking the interest of his community which is responsible for so much of the misery from which we suffer today.

Again, Sir, I fully agree with the honourable member when he says that separate electorates have done us no good. In his long experience, he has found that it does not in any way assuage the ill-feeling between communities; he has found that it has not created better feeling between Hindus and Muslims. At one time he had hoped that separate electorates might do this. Therefore, because this proved a failure, he still wishes to go on with it, and therefore he wishes today to support separate electorates. I confess I cannot follow this line of argument. If in 1928-29, he had felt that for a temporary period separate electorates might create confidence in the different communities and might be necessary as a transient measure, there might have been some justification for it.

But his maturer experience today should have convinced him that this way does not lie the salvation of India.

Sir, on another occasion, a few days ago, I was trying to explain to this House about the communal tension in this province. What I said in regard to this province applies probably generally to India as a whole. But, unfortunately, time did not allow me to draw the conclusion which was inevitable from the analysis which I placed before the House. It is obvious to the mind of anyone who has a clear intellect and can look at the question dispassionately, that the only remedy for the present state of affairs is to have this question considered by the two communities together in a calm manner. It has been the interest of the third party, namely, British Imperialism, to divide and rule. Therefore, it has set up sometimes the Hindu middle classes against the Muslim middle classes and sometimes the Muslim middle classes against the Hindu middle classes. It has tried to hold the balance between the two rival communities and egged them on, though not always consciously or directly, but nevertheless, by the force of economic circumstances, by the pressure of events. And the only solution to this problem is the creation of an atmosphere in which the two communities might realize the stupidity of standing separated from each other and the need of coming together and jointly realizing their common destiny. But, as I said a moment ago, a good case is often spoilt by bad pleading; and I might say that even though it was indubitably clear that the only conclusion which could follow from the analysis that I put before the House was that the solution of this problem lies in unity between the two

communities, and the creation of a common solidarity, yet, some papers which call themselves, or rather miscall themselves, nationalist papers have found that the only conclusion from my speech was that there should be separate electorates. It may be a case of utter failure of intelligence, but when public opinion is guided by persons who lack intelligence or perhaps lack the desire to acquire correct information, then we come to the condition of affairs in which we unfortunately find ourselves today. Our leaders very often, for their personal interests, misguide the masses. Our newspapers for various considerations misguide the masses, and add to our troubles. But we must try to steer our course in such a way that passion does not sway our judgement. We must look at a question dispassionately, and specially where intellectual analysis has to be brought to bear upon a problem. We should appeal to reason or to the intellect. Therefore, in considering this question, even if we differ from our colleagues, we should not allow passion to carry us away or our prejudices to blind our intellect, but calmly and dispassionately consider the question and decide what is best for the two communities, best for the country and for India as a whole.

After all, what happens in Calcutta is not an isolated thing. Calcutta is not an isolated fact in Bengal. It does not stand by itself, it is a part of the province as a whole, it is a part of the organized life of the province, and not only of the province but of India as a whole. Therefore, whatever happens in Calcutta has its repercussion on the whole province.

Now, Sir, coming back to the Bill which we are considering today, I shall go back to the first statement I

made. It is a stupid Bill and an unnecessary Bill. I fully agree with Sir Nazimuddin when he said yesterday that a majority was assured to the Hindus even though it was but a slight majority. There is little doubt that even under the proposed Bill, 54 seats will be under the control of the Hindus. Of the 47 general seats, it is almost certain that 45 will go to the Hindus and they may also [illegible] the votes of the three Scheduled Caste Councillors who even though nominated—although it is said that a nominated member has no community, no religion or caste, but is expected to vote only with Government. For there are occasions when even nominated members will turn and it has been found that on occasion even a nominated member will defend the interests of his community. Then it becomes 45 *plus* 3 or 48. The two labour seats are also certain to go to the Hindus, that makes 50 Hindus out of 93 Councillors. I am not discussing this matter from a political point of view at this moment. If these 50 Hindu Councillors can combine, they are sure to elect 5 Aldermen of their own choice, or even if they fail to capture all the seats, they are fairly sure to capture at least 4. That gives them 54 members in a House of 98, which is nothing but an absolute majority.

My point is that this Bill which maintains the communal position of the Hindus and yet irritates them for nothing is a stupid Bill and an unnecessary Bill. If I understand aright the intention of the framers of this Bill, there are two principles behind the Bill—one is that the representatives of the Muslims should be such as enjoy the confidence of the Muslim community, and to that

question I shall come in a moment. But there is another element in the intention of the framers of the Bill and that is that the Muslims in the city of Calcutta should have a larger share in the administration of the city and in the control of its affairs. But will that purpose be fulfilled? If you raise communal passions, if you divide the communities on communal lines, Hindus for Hindus and Muslims for Muslims, then persons of a particular political party may not be returned, but will it improve matters? I shall try to convince the House that it will be a misfortune if, instead of political parties being reflected in the Corporation, we get groups of individuals who stand for no well-defined principles and policies. Friends opposite may have their objection to individual Congressmen, but can they deny that as an organization, as a political body, the Congress is by its very constitution and aims committed to further the common interests of all the communities? If instead of the Congress, a party is returned which stands for Hindu interests alone and is flagrantly communal in the sense in which that term is used here in India, will it lead to a better state of affairs? Will this give to the Muslims of this city greater control of the administration of the Corporation?

It is a generally accepted principle that where there is intense communal consciousness it is the minority which has to suffer. I think that the honourable members who have spoken from the other side of the House have misread their history when they think that separate electorates give any protection to a minority community. Separate electorates can never be a means of protection to a minority. It is always the majority which gains by

separate electorates. If you have water-tight compartments where a majority only votes for the majority, then by mere force of number they will return men who will be elected by a communally-conscious electorate and press the interest of that particular community; and the minority, however able it might be and however sincere and devoted it might be, voting only for their minority community, cannot stand against the combined onslaught of a communal majority like that. Therefore, in a community where communal consciousness is keen, it is the minority which will suffer. It is no protection to a minority if that minority does not have a voice in the return of those who form the Government; if the minority has no voice, it has no control in the election of members who will control the destinies of the province or of the city. Therefore, separate electorates are never a protection to any minority.

Now, Sir, let us come to the facts as they are in Calcutta. There is no denying the fact that Mr Shaheed Suhrawardy, although I differ radically from his politics, is a very able man. Let us now assume that we return 22 Shaheed Suhrawardys to the Corporation. What happens? Muslims voting on communal lines return 22 Shaheed Suhrawardys; but 22 Shaheed Suhrawardys will be of no avail against 54 duffers elected by the Hindu community, assuming for the sake of argument, though it is hardly likely to be the case, that only duffers will be returned by the Hindus. If this division is on communal lines, then these 54 duffers will be 32 times more effective than all the 22 Shaheed Suhrawardys communally sent. Therefore, I urge once more that in a separate electorate

it is the minority which always suffers. If there is a joint electorate, there would be this protection to the Muslim community that candidates of the Hindu community would have to go to the Muslim voters. Nobody can then hope to be returned unless he secures a certain percentage of Muslim support. There is no denying the fact that whenever there is a contested election, different men of the same community will fight each other. Mr Nalini Ranjan Sarkar will perhaps fight with, let us say, Mr Sarat Chandra Bose. Both are men of considerable ability, both have considerable followers in their community. Even though in the circumstances of today Mr Sarkar does not enjoy much confidence of the Hindu community, yet it is not impossible to imagine in political developments a contingency when this support may be forthcoming. If such a situation arises, if there be two candidates of ability among the Hindus, it may be that the Muslim votes will turn the scale. Even apart from the Muslim votes in a joint electorate, the candidates dare not make any appeal which will arouse the passions of the Muslim community, which will set the Muslim community against the Hindu community or vice versa. They must depend on the common suffrage of the two communities. The machinery of election will be organized in such an atmosphere and in such a manner that bitter feelings will not be evoked. Reason will be given every chance to make itself felt and better feelings will prevail. Therefore, it is the minority which will suffer whenever there is a separate communal electorate.

One point which the separate-electorate people bring forward is this: It is true that in the election of the

members of the majority, the minority has a voice, but in many cases it may not be an effective or telling voice. Let us take again the present condition in Calcutta. If Mr Nalini Ranjan Sarkar and Mr Sarat Chandra Bose seek election in the present circumstances of Calcutta, there is no doubt whatsoever that even if Mr Sarkar gets all the votes of the Muslim community, Mr Sarat Chandra Bose will be returned with an overwhelming majority. For, today in Calcutta there are about 1,000 general votes for every 300 Muslim votes. Therefore, the defenders of separate electorates may say that if this happens in the case of the Hindu candidates, what about the Muslim candidates? Suppose one of them gets 290 Muslim votes and 200 Hindu votes, but the other candidate gets 700 Hindu votes and is returned, although he gets only 10 Muslim votes. Under separate electorates, only that man is returned who enjoys the confidence of his community. That is the only argument of the *separate-electorate-wallas*, if I may coin the term. But nevertheless, even this argument is faulty; and not only that, it is possible to think of a safeguard—a formula under which no candidate will be returned to the Corporation or to the Legislature or to any other body unless he enjoys a certain fraction of the support of the men of his own community. I have had discussions with certain members both of the Coalition Party and of the Congress on a certain formula which might give us a chance of coming to an amicable settlement, in which it will be prescribed that no man can be returned who does not enjoy a certain proportion of the support of both the communities. If we have a provision, for instance, that no candidate will be returned,

whether he be Hindu or Muslim, unless he polls 25 per cent of the votes cast by the members of each community, then it will be of great use in unravelling the communal tangle. Here we have the best method of safeguarding the interests of the minority, because the minority is assured that only those men are going to the Corporation who enjoy a proportion of its own support and at the same time also enjoy the confidence of the majority community. Those Muslims will be returned in whom Hindus have confidence and on the other hand, Hindu candidates will have to satisfy their own as well as the minority community. In places where there is a preponderant majority of one community, under a joint electorate a man from the minority community might be returned with the votes of the majority community; a man might be returned who enjoys the confidence of the majority but not that of the minority, which he is specifically expected to represent. This is perhaps the only ground which those who are in favour of separate electorates might advance. But we have to weigh in the balance the advantages and the disadvantages of such a scheme. As I was suggesting a moment ago, if we give special protection to minorities, in doing so we shall sever the two communities from each other, and if we have these water-tight compartments, we shall be absolving the Hindu candidates from all necessity of appealing to the Muslim electorate, and Musalmans will have no voice whatsoever in the election of Hindu candidates. Therefore, even though the Muslim representative might be said to be a representative of the Musalman point of view, there is no chance that

he will be able to influence the decision of the Corporation.

Therefore I would suggest some device, some formula by which the genuine apprehensions of the minority might be removed, and in terms of which, at the same time, the two communities might work together. In saying this, I am conscious that the formula I am going to suggest will mean a great deal of sacrifice on the part of the Hindu community. It is not a concession to the Hindu community, but to the Muslim community; it is a concession from the Hindu community to the Muslim community. The formula which I suggest is one under which no one will be returned unless he polls 25 per cent of the votes cast by the electors in both the communities. What is the *quid pro quo* in such a transaction? On the one hand the Hindu community will have a voice in the election of Muslim candidates, and on the other hand the Muslim electorate will have a voice in the return of Hindu candidates. The Muslim candidates, whether A, B or C, must poll at least 25 per cent of the Hindu votes which have been actually cast in an election. Therefore, to that extent, Hindus will determine who among the Muslims will be returned, but in return for that what am I asking the Hindu community to offer? I am asking that the Hindu community should agree to a scheme in which their candidates will equally have to depend upon the votes of the Muslim voters. They must also secure 25 per cent of the votes cast by the Muslim voters. Therefore, the transaction is largely in favour of the Muslim community, and though I know that I am being partial to the community to which I belong, yet I believe that in view of the broader

considerations which we have to face and in view of the need of creating a better atmosphere, for a better Bengal and a better India, I believe that the Hindu community will rise equal to the occasion and make this sacrifice.

I do not yet know what the reaction of the Hindu community as a whole will be to this scheme. I have discussed this matter with certain of my friends, some of them have agreed, and some of them have not fully agreed, while there are some others who disagree. Nevertheless, I have the hope that if a compromise of this sort, if a formula of this sort is generally acceptable to the Muslim community, the Hindu community will probably rise to the occasion. In return for the control which they will exercise upon the return of the 22 Muslim candidates, I hope they will be willing to offer to the Muslims a voice in the election of 47 General councillors. Here, therefore, under the scheme which I am offering to the House, the Muslims will have the right to determine and influence the election of not only the 22 Muslim councillors as proposed in the Government Bill, but also the election of 47 *plus* 22, or in all 69 councillors out of the 93 who would constitute the Corporation. But the main reason I am pressing for such a solution is that it will eliminate communal ill-feeling and restore better relations between the communities. It is a special protection that I am asking for the minority, for it is a combination of the principle of minority representation proportionate to the voting strength with the system of straight voting now in vogue in the Corporation. In proportionate representation, the minority always secures its rights and in direct voting the majority always gains. This combination of

proportionate representation and direct voting will, I believe, give the Muslim minority that protection of which it seems to stand in need. Though I personally think that the Muslim community is not in need of any such protection, though I personally think that they will be able to hold their own in open competition, I have yet suggested this formula for removing fears, if any, in the mind of the average Muslim. It is because of this that I have differed with persons who claim to be leaders of the Muslim community in India today, for I feel that they are unnecessarily weakening the community and, if I may use a strong term, emasculating the community by always insisting upon special privileges on the ground that the Muslims cannot compete on equal terms with other communities. That is a position which I have never accepted and shall never accept. And all these pleas for separate electorates, special privileges and safeguards are put forward only because these leaders, for many historical reasons, do not have that confidence in themselves which leaders of a community should possess.

Now, Sir, to return to the formula which I was suggesting, this will give the General electorate of Calcutta the right of electing 69 councillors out of 93, and not merely that, it will compel every candidate to frame his election programme in a way that will appeal to the common interests of the two communities. That I think is the most important element in the formula. If the election programme is framed on the lines of common interest and if special safeguards are given to the minority community, I do not for a moment understand why Muslims should be afraid. In fact, as I have suggested

earlier, it gives the Muslims far more than they have a right to demand. It will be, in fact, in the nature of a concession granted by the Hindu group, but a concession agreed upon between the Hindu and Muslim communities. And I have the hope that the great Hindu community will rise to the height of the occasion.

Then, there is the other question—what is the purpose of the Bill? One of the motives behind the Bill seems to be to secure an increase of the share of Muslims in the control of the Corporation, and I think I have demonstrated to the House, and I believe that there is nobody in this House who will disagree, that this new Bill does not give any additional control to the Muslims but reduces them to the position of a perpetual ineffective minority. Because, so long as these divisions are on communal lines and consolidated on that basis, it will not be possible for the Muslims to transcend these barriers and appeal to the Hindus on the ground of a common policy. And the second objective seems to be that those Muslims alone shall be returned who enjoy the confidence of their own community. But the formula which I have suggested whilst avoiding the pernicious features of the Bill, yet at the same time gives the Muslims that protection which they demand. It is not, therefore, true that under joint electorates only those men will be returned who enjoy the confidence of the majority community and not of the minority community. I think I have sufficiently demonstrated the fallacy of a statement like this. I therefore conclude, Sir, with an appeal to the Government to consider dispassionately this suggestion that I have thrown out. This is a matter which should be objectively considered.

At the very beginning of my speech I said that passions may be aroused and it is difficult to assuage them. Let not the Prime Minister act as one who arouses passion; let him act as one who assuages passion. Let him act as one who brings peace and amity among the communities and not as one who brings discord and hatred; let him act as one who achieves his success through the co-operation, through the good feeling and solidarity of the two great communities of Bengal, and be remembered for ever as a peace-maker and a man of good-will.

May 1939

XI. INDIA AND THE WAR

Mr President, Sir, I beg to move that in place of the resolution which has been moved, the following be substituted, namely,

'This Council associates itself with the world-wide abhorrence of the aggressive and ruthless methods pursued by the Imperialistic Governments of the world against the smaller and weaker nations and dependencies, and reiterates its complete disapproval of the manner in which India has been made a participant in the war against her consent.

'This Council, therefore, directs Government to convey to the Government of India and through them to the British Government that in consonance with the professed aims of the present war, it is essential in order to secure the co-operation of the Indian people that the principles of democracy and freedom should forthwith be applied to India and her policy should be guided by her people; and that India should be recognized as an independent State entitled to frame her own constitution through a Constituent Assembly to be elected on universal adult franchise with sufficient and effective safeguards for the recognized minorities and their interests.'

Sir, I do not think it is necessary for me to make a long speech in support of a resolution of this type. The speeches which have been made up till now themselves tend to support the amendment that I have moved. But I must confess at the very outset that my standpoint is somewhat

different from those who have spoken so far. Most of the persons who have spoken till now have spoken of the aggression which is occurring in Europe at the present moment, the aggression which Germany has committed in attacking Poland and which Soviet Russia is accused of committing in Finland today. But I think, Sir, if we look at the question of aggression, it is a much wider question that we have to consider. Aggressive and ruthless methods are not the monopoly of any one nation or State in the world today, but they have been exercised by all the Imperialistic Governments of the world. The fact that we have different Imperial Governments in different parts of the world is in itself sufficient proof that crimes have been committed against weaker nations, smaller States and dependencies. The existence of dependencies in the modern world is in itself a condemnation of the world order in which we live and, therefore, when I speak of our abhorrence of aggressive and ruthless methods, this abhorrence is directed towards the policy of all those Governments, including the British Government, which today are carrying on these methods in order to retain their hold over their dependencies.

Therefore, the first point which I would like this Council to consider is that when we talk of aggression, we must keep our minds free from the war propaganda which has been carried on from day to day. It was Lord Ponsonby who said that truth is the first casualty in a war. During the last war we were told all sorts of atrocity stories about things done by both sides, by the respective Governments concerned, and similar things are being stated today. We must therefore go beyond what is said in the newspapers

and try to find out the reasons for the aggression, the conflict and the turmoil.

When we try to understand the reason for this aggression or that conflict, there is no doubt whatever that the real reason lies in the discontent which prevails amongst smaller nations and weaker States. We have a significant example of this in Palestine. It is because there are smaller and weaker nations and dependencies which are seething with discontent that there exist centres of unrest and trouble in the world. Big powers try to fish in these troubled waters, and out of avarice and greed try to take possession of the smaller nations. I think the greatest menace to the peace of the world today is the existence of the British Empire; because so long as the British Empire with its command over the resources of such a large portion of the world remains, other powerful nations will want a share in the spoils which Great Britain has enjoyed almost alone till now. It is also inevitable that the countries which are under the domination of the British Empire today will try to rise, and if these countries try to rise, it is inevitable that there will be conflicts, not in one but in different parts of the world. The repercussions then will be far-reaching. Some time ago, it was openly said that the Palestine question was created in order to make the position of the British Empire secure in the Near East. The Jewish problem was created in order to curb the Arabs and in order to deny them their independence. Once the problem is created and there is a local disturbance, others come in. It was freely said that Germany and Russia took full advantage of the discontent which existed in Palestine and helped the Arabs against the Jews

and in this way kept the whole of Palestine in constant turmoil.

When, therefore, we talk of aggression and ruthless methods, we must talk of the aggression and ruthless methods of all Imperialist Governments. And the only way of getting rid of these, the only way of saving the world and preserving peace in the world is to have a new world order in which there will be no dependencies and no weaker nations, in which we shall have a federation or commonwealth of free men, where the rights of all nations to self-determination shall be recognized.

It seemed to us for a moment when the present war started that certain powerful personalities in England realized the importance of self-determination for all the nations of the world, and that was why even Mr Neville Chamberlain at first talked of a new world order. But very soon it was pointed out to him that the new world order in which everybody would enjoy freedom and democracy meant a dissolution of the British Empire as we knew it. Immediately came a change, and in all his recent speeches he has been talking of a new European order. It is a significant change. If we do not want freedom and democracy for the world but only for Europe, the result will be another world war. The Great War of 1914 was a war to end all wars and yet ended in a peace which has landed us in a greater world war today. Professor Keynes in his marvellous book *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* foretold about 14 years ago that the result of the Treaty of Versailles would be another European conflagration and his prophecy has been fulfilled today. If, therefore, European statesmen do not rise above

their narrow parochial boundaries and considerations, I am afraid very soon, perhaps in our own generation, we shall again be faced with a conflict in which the world's civilization will be finally destroyed.

Sir, this war professes to be a war for freedom and democracy and yet in this war India has been made a participant against her consent. There is no denying that the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League between themselves represent by far the vast majority of the Indian nation. In this country, there are certain sections who do not belong to either, but they are in a minority. The vast majority of the people are represented by the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League. Both these bodies have declared more than once that they were not a party to India's participation in the war, and when war was declared both condemned the enforced participation of India in the war to which she was not a party. Therefore, by the very practice, by the very method which is being followed in the prosecution of the war, it has been established beyond doubt that the present war is not a war for freedom and democracy but a war of Imperialistic aggression. It is a war of Imperialistic aggression in which the aggressor at the moment may be Germany, but the British Government are equally guilty. They are defending what they have won in an unlawful manner. What they have taken by the sword they are defending by the sword. If you condemn one who wants to take by the sword now, you cannot justify another who is defending by the sword what he has obtained by the sword in the past.

The next part of the resolution refers to the professed aims of the present war. I have used the word 'professed'

quite deliberately. In spite of the many declarations made by him, Mr Neville Chamberlain has never been known as a great lover of democracy. His solicitude for democracy and freedom did not show itself when Czecho-Slovakia was attacked, when the Südetenland was taken away by Germany, when Austria was invaded and occupied and when Germany fortified the Rhineland. In all these cases there was no question of freedom and democracy, but the moment Germany attacks Poland and there is a threat that Germany might become too powerful and dominate Europe, all Mr Chamberlain's love for freedom and democracy immediately comes to the fore, all the forgotten loyalty and allegiance to the ideals which the League of Nations has been trying to propagate for a number of years again remembered. And Great Britain goes to war. Therefore, I have used the word 'professed' deliberately; but if this profession is real, if it is genuine,—and the test of its genuineness will be the attitude of Great Britain towards India—and if we find that the real aim of the war, so far as the British Government are concerned, is to ensure that there will be no Imperial conquests in future, that there will be freedom and democracy for the whole world, then every Indian will support Great Britain in her war and I have no doubt whatsoever that every party in India will support Great Britain in her attempt to counter Germany.

My resolution further says that in order to secure the co-operation of the Indian people, the principles of democracy and freedom should forthwith be applied to India and her policy should be guided by her people. It will be seen that it is only an amplification of what is already

contained in the professed war aims of the British Government which, as I have pointed out, Mr Chamberlain has later on modified, till it is no longer a question of a new world order but only of a new European order.

The last part of the resolution refers to the way in which India should be recognized as an independent nation, entitled to frame her own constitution through a constituent assembly to be elected on universal adult franchise with sufficient and effective safeguards for the recognized minorities and their interests. Once we admit that India is a nation, the question of her constitution becomes a pressing problem. It has been said again and again that there is the problem of the minorities. It has been said again and again that there are the interests of the Princes. I think that after the reply which Dr Rajendra Prasad gave to His Excellency the Viceroy, all these objections are absolutely beside the point. In that reply he made it perfectly clear that if the British Government once declare that they will implement a constitution which is arrived at by agreement between the different Indian parties, then it will be the business of the Indian people to see that such a constitution is framed. Supposing the Muslim League and the Congress come to an agreement tomorrow and supposing the other important groups accept that agreement and there is an agreed constitution, what guarantee is there that that constitution will be honoured by the British Government and put into effect?

So long as we do not know that the British Government are really prepared to implement such a settlement, the Indian people will not feel any responsibility in the matter; but if the responsibility were once placed upon the Indian

people and then after that we failed, the British Government could certainly say: We promised the Indians that if they could come to an agreement, we would honour that agreement but they failed to do so. After that, no one could accuse Great Britain of going against the will of the people of India and we would be laughed out of court at the bar of world opinion. But if that is not done, it does not lie in the mouth of anybody, however highly placed he may be, to say that Indians have not come to an agreement.

Supposing I have the power to nominate the representatives of Great Britain and I nominate Mr Neville Chamberlain and Mr Lloyd George, men who are or have been the Premiers of Great Britain and are therefore undoubtedly representative of England, Mr George Bernard Shaw, one of the most important Englishmen of today, Mr Tom Gallachar, who is the leader of the British Communist Party, Mr Oswald Mosley, one of the most prominent persons in English public life, and Mr H. G. Wells and Mr Bertrand Russell. They are all men with an international reputation—men who are honoured not only in their own country but in all the countries of the world. Now, if they were asked to sit round a table and come to an agreement about a constitution for England, I have grave doubts if they would come to a unanimous decision. Therefore, when the British Government chose people in whom the Indian people had no confidence—picked out men, if I may use a harsh term, almost from the dustbin of neglect (by public opinion) and placed them in a position of responsibility, it does not lie in the mouth of the British Government to say that Indians have not been able

to come to an agreement. I shall give only one example. Sir Abdulla Haroon, who was unsuccessful even in an ordinary general election in Sind, was asked by His Excellency the Viceroy to join in the cavalcade of fifty-two. The Hon. Mr Allah Bux, who was the Premier of Sind, was not considered fit to be called for an interview when the future destiny of India was being considered. The Premier of the North-West Frontier Province, Dr Khan Sahib, was also not called. These two provinces I am mentioning specifically, because these are two Muslim majority provinces. The Muslim majority in the North-West Frontier Province is, I believe, 95 per cent of the total population and Mr Allah Bux is the Premier of a province where the Muslim majority is something like 70 per cent; and yet the representative of Sind, when the Viceroy wanted one, was Sir Abdulla Haroon who could not get returned to the Assembly and not the Hon. Mr Allah Bux. Therefore, if we wish to talk of an agreement in India, we must know which India it is. Is it the India which represents special interests, sectional interests and sometimes even individual interests—for it may be that these individuals do not represent anybody but themselves? But let the will of the people be declared, through a constituent assembly elected on adult franchise, and if these elected leaders of the people cannot come to an agreement, then alone does it lie in the mouth of the British Government to say that we are unfit because we are not able to come to any agreement. Otherwise, it does not lie in the mouth of anybody to accuse us of not coming to an agreement when a Round Table Conference is devised, with all sorts of variegated personalities, some of

whom represent small groups and some of whom represent nobody at all.

It was said by my honourable friend that in a constituent assembly like this, the Muslims would only be a small group of about 90 in a House of 360 or 400. Against that, I would say that if the accredited leaders of the Muslim community are represented in a constituent assembly like this and if they demand anything unanimously, it stands to reason that the other groups would have to come to terms. I shall put the same thing in another way. Supposing you do not want a constituent assembly, you certainly want a settlement of the outstanding questions between the different communities. Who will represent these communities? Unless there is some method for the expression of the popular will, unless there is an election of some sort or other, there is no means to ascertain popular opinion.

Therefore, there are two considerations for us to remember. If we wish to come to a settlement, we must have elected leaders, because we cannot recognize the leaders whom the Viceroy might nominate on our behalf. That has been our misfortune in the past. Therefore, some sort of election we must have, and the question arises: Of what sort? If the majority of Muslims want a separate electorate, and after election their leaders by an overwhelming majority want anything in the special interests of the Muslims—who, in my opinion, are hardly a minority—I am sure their wishes cannot be overlooked by any constituent assembly. Therefore, whichever way you look at it, if we desire that there should be a settlement of the outstanding questions, that the right of India to

self-determination should be recognized, we must have a constituent assembly and, if necessary, through separate electorates. If that is done, I am quite confident that some sort of an agreement will be achieved. In the past, Hindus and Muslims have lived together in peace and even to-day, in spite of occasional quarrels, they live on the whole in peace. Some of their quarrels are not communal quarrels at all, but quarrels based on economic and some-times even on personal questions. I think no member of this House can contradict me when I say that a good deal of communalism is nothing but personal interests masquerading as communal interests. Real commu-nalism is not so easy, for it means that you must subordi-nate personal ends to the interests of the community; and this in India can only mean national interests, for the interests of the communities are interlocked inextricably. Hunger and poverty are the same for everyone and the desire for development, for industrial and commercial ex-pansion, is the same for all communities in India. There-fore, when it is a question of communalism, invariably we shall find that it is a question of the narrow, self-interest of some group or individual. If through the adult electorate of a constituent assembly we return our accre-dited leaders, and if they do not come to a settlement, then alone will it be for the British Government to say 'You have failed'. But if they can come to an agreement, and I am sure they can, then the British Government must agree to and ratify such a constitution for India. Then and then alone can it be said that Great Britain is fight-ing for freedom and liberty and the establishment of a new world order.

Before I conclude, may I quote from a speech which I delivered in Oxford, about eight years ago, in opposing Lord Allen? There the same sort of situation had arisen. Of course, there was no world war then, but the same sort of discussion was going on about the condition of Europe at the time and what the future held in store. And there, in concluding my speech, I said that if the British people really want that there should be a commonwealth of nations, if the British people really want that there should be freedom and democracy for the smaller nations of the world and that the principle of self-determination must be applied to India, India would have no objection whatsoever—indeed, India would be proud to be associated in a real commonwealth of nations based on freedom and democracy. But such a commonwealth, in order to bring about a real federation of the different races of the world, must cease to be merely British. We cannot have a British Commonwealth of Nations, because it is a contradiction in terms. If it is a commonwealth, it cannot be merely British. If it is British, it cannot be a real commonwealth.

I think that the paradox we are facing today is the inevitable development of the situation which existed even eight years ago. All these conflicts arise because there is a British Empire which pretends to be the guarantor of peace and security in the world. So long as the Empire is British, it cannot guarantee the freedom and peace of the world even though it might, so long as it is powerful enough, guarantee the security of the world. Therefore, I move my amendment and I am confident that all members of this House—irrespective of party,

including the European members—will support my motion.

In conclusion, Sir, I may say that a lot has been said about the bargaining aspect of a resolution like this. I am not ashamed of bargaining. It certainly is bargaining. The British Government are bargaining; so is the Congress and so are the Indian people. Naturally, we are all bargaining. Can anybody deny that if tomorrow there is peace in Europe and there is some sort of an honourable settlement between Germany and Great Britain, all these demands of India will be thrown into the waste-paper basket? Can anybody deny that with the solution of the European tangle, the Indian demand will once more go into cold storage till the next outbreak of world disturbance? Can anybody deny that it is because the British Government are in difficulties today that the Indian demand is being considered at all? If that is true of England, it is equally true of us. This, Sir, is our opportunity. If we cannot now unite and demand the freedom which is our birth-right and which we have lost through our own fault, our own stupidity and our communal quarrels, we shall stand forever condemned at the bar of history.

December 1939

XII. LITERATURE OF THE MACHINE AGE

In no generation has the poet, the novelist, the dramatist or the man of letters been uninfluenced by man's activities in other spheres of life. Nor is it difficult to understand why this should be so. It is only men of a heightened sensibility that express themselves in works of art. How can they shut out the influence of the world outside and yet remain artists? Every age has its own dominant temper and each sphere of life reflects it from its own aspect. This is true of every form of literature, but perhaps nowhere is the influence of the age so immediately perceptible as in its poetry.

The tremendous expansion of the spirit that followed the Renaissance showed itself not only in the intrepid quest for new lands beyond the seas but also in bold voyagings into the inmost recesses of the human heart. The intense and austere fervour of puritanism showed itself not only in an increasing constriction of social and political life, but also in the perplexed preoccupations of the metaphysical poets. In more recent times, the influence of the theory of evolution not only led to a new emphasis upon history and the biological sciences, but also gave a new undertone of buoyant optimism to the works of Tennyson and Browning that would have been out of place in any other age. What wonder then that looking around us today we see at every turn the impress of the machine age on the poetry of the twentieth century?

This influence of the machine on the poetry of the age has expressed itself in diverse ways. It is most evident in

the choice of subjects and similes, but in spite of its obviousness, this is perhaps also the most superficial of the changes that the supremacy of the machine has wrought in the poetic consciousness. Could there be a poet like Wilfrid Gibson in any other age? Titles like *The Crane*, *The Tramcar* and *The Furnace* sufficiently indicate the material in which he works, but perhaps even more significant of his tone and temper is a poem like *The Formula*:

'Vanadium and titanium clarify
The molten metal, chromium hardens it,
While tungsten, molybdenum and cobalt
Prevent a loss of temper . . . . Could but I
Find a like formula to free from fault
Harden and temper this poor brittle wit
To an infrangible will of stainless steel!'

Dorothy Wellesley has little in common with Gibson. Their background, approach and attitude are as different as can be, and yet she also is bitten by the iron tooth of the age. To her, docks are wonderful making commerce classical, and turning sublime the warehouse crammed with jute or flax or tea:

'When paint or steel or wood are wearing thin,
Then they come in:
The liners, schooners, merchantmen and tramps,
Upon a head of water pressing hard
On gates of greenheart wood, that close and guard
The docks, till lintels, clamps,
Swing suddenly on quoins steel-pivoted,
With harsh complaint and clang,
And then above the walls arise and spread
Top-gallant yards or funnel, spanker-vang

Or dolphin-striker; figure-heads arise
That settling sway
Beside an inn: a mermaid's breasts and eyes
Beneath a bowsprit glare beside a dray.'

In the case of T. S. Eliot, the influence of the machine penetrates deeper still. It shows itself not so much in his subjects or imagery as in the tone and temper of his work. Yet he has supplied us with one of the most perfect examples of a simile drawn from the machine:

'At the violet hour, when eyes and back
Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits
Like a taxi throbbing waiting . . . . '

Even poets who show no trace of the rust of metal cannot fully escape the spirit of the age. If in nothing else, the machine asserts itself in a chance image or metaphor. One would hardly think of Wilfred Owen in connexion with the influence of the machine on poetry, but even for him, 'earth's wheels run oiled with blood.'

More significant than this influence on theme or metaphor has been the influence on temper and technique. Here the effects are not so obvious but they are the deeper and more abiding. In technique, the three characteristics of modern poetry that proclaim themselves most insistently are concentration, precision and complicatedness. Today there is an almost religious abhorrence of looseness and diffuseness. The excesses of the romantic movement led to a feebleness of expression that was often nauseating, but the invertebrate verbiage could not continue indefinitely. Placid understatement of personal experience gave place to the raw nakedness and violence of a Hopkins.

Even the violence could not continue for long and we find in much of modern poetry the attempt to concentrate in each line and stanza a maximum of suggestion and meaning. Much of the difficulty of modern poetry is due to this condensation and compression. All non-essentials are discarded and the very movement of the verse is marked by a taut austerity and strength.

Edith Sitwell has compared the muscular system of Eliot's verse to that of a jaguar, but perhaps it is more accurate to compare the movement of his verse to that of a dynamo, vibrant with the energy of concentrated power:

> 'I should have been a pair of ragged claws
> Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.'

Or again, though the suggestion of power is absent, can there be a finer example of concentration than when Eliot compresses the ennui, the aimlessness and futility of an existence devoted to the fulfilment of pointless social obligations into one single line:

> 'I have measured out my life with coffee spoons'?

The second characteristic of modern poetry to which we have referred is its precision. It is not for nothing that there has been a revival of admiration for Dryden and Pope. In place of the vague and indefinite suggestion of the romantic metaphor, the demand today is for the sharp and precise image. A passion for exactness leads modern poets to polish and refine their lines to a point of brittle brilliance. W. H. Auden, for example:

> '. . . . . nears the glitter
> Of glaciers, the sterile miniature mountains

intense

In the abnormal day of the world, and a river's
Fan-like polyp of sand.'

This precision is also the secret of A. E. Housman's art. He states in bleak unadorned tones what he actually sees and feels:

'Now hollow fires burn out to black,
And lights are guttering low:
Square your shoulders, lift your pack,
And leave your friends and go.
Oh never fear, man, nought's to dread,
Look not left nor right:
In all the endless road you tread
There's nothing but the night.'

In Sturge Moore, the precision shows itself in deliberate filigree work:

'Each hingèd valve curves out and rims
Pink, yellow, purple, green or blue,
A colour-whisper's graded hue;
While dinted lobe, spine or rib limns
Crisp helmet, cuspèd shard to wing:
Full panoply for fairy king.'

The same precision and sharp definition, though the temper is different as different can be, characterizes Eliot's lines:

'When lovely woman stoops to folly, and
Paces about her room again, alone,
She smooths her hair with automatic hand,
And puts a record on the gramophone.'

Even more significant than the concentration and precision of modern poetry is its complicatedness. This is perhaps the main source of its difficulty and obscurity as

well. The modern poet is not content to take an experience by itself but must seek out its affiliations with events and incidents that at first sight offer no point of contact. He repeats his theme on many levels of experience and seeks in it the influence of the most distant past. There are no loose joints in the universe, proclaims the mechanistic view of life and the modern poet seeks to apply the theory to his poetic practice.

T. S. Eliot again offers us the most characteristic example of this complicatedness of modern poetry. In *The Waste Land,* he has tried to bring together the broken images of human hopes and fears, of past and present civilizations and their irretrievable doom. Cleopatra and the typist girl, Elizabeth and Leicester are all held together in one common spell while London and Carthage exhibit the same glow of blazing destruction.

> 'After the torchlight red on sweaty faces
> After the frosty silence in the gardens
> After the agony in stony places
> The shouting and the crying
> Prison and palace and reverberation
> Of thunder, of spring over distant mountains
> He who was living is now dead
> We who were living are now dying.'

His only consolation in this universal desolation is:

> 'These fragments I have shored against my ruins.'

This abstruseness is responsible both for the majesty as well as the obscurity of Yeats's later poems. He is at one and the same time conscious of several planes of thought. He simultaneously feels in his blood the surge of achievement and failure of many civilizations:

'Civilization is hooped together, brought
Under a rule, under the semblance of peace
By manifold illusion; but man's life is thought,
And he, despite his terror, cannot cease
Ravening through century after century,
Ravening, raging and uprooting that he may come
Into the desolation of reality:
Egypt and Greece good-bye, and good-bye, Rome!

Hermits upon Mount Meru or Everest,
Caverned in night under the drifted snow,
Or where that snow and winter's dreadful blast
Beat down upon their naked bodies, know
That day brings round the night, that before dawn
His glory and his monuments are gone.'

Is it fanciful to think that this demand for concentration, precision and complicatedness is a reflection in poetry of the temper of the machine age? The machine age need not, and in the last analysis, perhaps cannot be expressed only by machine images, but by new rhythms, new attitudes and new modes of dealing with old materials. A vast and complex machine with its intricate arrangement of cogs and wheels, its sharp precision of detail and concentrated reserve of power suggests an immediate analogy with much of the best of modern poetry.

The brooding sense of necessity which governs the poetry of Hardy and Housman and the sharp and metallic quality of the imagery used in much of modern verse may each be explained on some other hypothesis, but in their combination they make a pattern that reminds one of the inexorable necessity of mechanical laws. The transience

of human life 'rolled round in earth's diurnal course with rocks and stones and trees' leads to Hardy's fatalism only against the background of the immutable laws that slowly emerge out of the inchoate. Even the intellectual nostalgia of an Edith Sitwell is nothing but a reaction against the growing materialism of the age.

T. S. Eliot is even today the most discussed of modern poets, for he has inveighed more powerfully than any of his contemporaries against the inert and material forces that seek to invade the very precincts of life and thought; against men tending to become things, material objects obeying mechanical laws--like the street, the gutter or the crane.

> 'We are the hollow men
> We are the stuffed men
> Leaning together
> Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!
> Our dried voices, when
> We whisper together
> Are quiet and meaningless
> As wind in dry grass
> Or rats' feet over broken glass
> In our dry cellar.
>
> Shape without form, shade without colour,
> Paralysed force, gesture without motion.'

February 1941

XIII. KEREN AND HARAR

Mr President, Sir, I am sure that members on all sides of the House are at one in congratulating the Indian soldiers on the bravery and heroism which they have shown in the North African campaign. I am sure that all people desire that after the terrible conflict which is going on all over the world today, there will be a real victory for democracy; and if this happens, it will be a matter of great rejoicing to all. But our rejoicings cannot be unreserved or unqualified till we know what is the purpose of this victory in Abyssinia. Are the victories at Keren and Harar going to bring freedom to Abyssinia, or will they only bring this unfortunate country into that peculiar phenomenon in political history known as the British Commonwealth of Nations? If Keren and Harar are really liberated, and if the Abyssinians get back their possessions and their liberty, which they lost very largely through the hesitation and connivance of England herself and the other European Powers, that will be a matter of genuine happiness to all the non-European communities of the world. If this victory be a harbinger of the restoration of independence to the Abyssinians, and if it is really a victory for the cause of democracy, then, Sir, it is a matter of congratulation for all sections of the House. But if it is otherwise, and if Abyssinia is reconquered only to become a member of the British Empire, then I do not think that the remarks which the Leader of the House has made are justified. And as yet we do not find any evidence that this is a battle for democracy.

When this matter was debated at length on an earlier occasion, we had occasion to express our point of view. We had also the opportunity to point out that the then Premier of England was changing his attitude with regard to the war aims and the peace aims of the British Government frequently. The culmination of that is evident in the recent speech of Lord Halifax in Washington. He said that the war aims and the peace aims of the Allies were to win the war. Nothing more could be stated definitely at present. The winning of the war cannot certainly be a peace aim. The British Government perhaps think that if they declare their war aims and peace aims now, they might not get that amount of support which they are getting now, even in England itself. In England, there is a large section of people who are against the policy of taking away the independence of other countries. In order to maintain peace and contentment, the independence of other nations must be respected. Then, again, a large volume of opinion has been growing in England which demands that there should be a thorough overhauling of the relations that now exist between the Dominions and the British Empire. There should be a thorough reconstitution of the whole British Empire till it disappears and in its place emerges a real Commonwealth of Nations, which in becoming a Commonwealth will cease to be British.

On a previous occasion, Sir, I said that the expression 'the British Commonwealth of Nations' was a contradiction in terms. If it is a Commonwealth of Nations, then it cannot be British. If it is British, then it cannot be a Commonwealth of Nations. Therefore, if the present

war ends in a victory for the oppressed nations of the world, it would be a glorious victory; but we cannot be sure as yet that this is what England is fighting for. Our rejoicings over this victory at Keren and Harar cannot be unqualified till we know the war and peace aims of England. We admire the bravery of the Indian and other soldiers who are taking part in this struggle but bravery is common to both the combatants. Both England and Germany are fighting for their existence and nobody questions their bravery. Nor can one question their sincerity and devotion to what they regard as their ideals. But until we know that Egypt is really going to be liberated, until we know that India is going to be free—that domination of one country by another will cease as a result of this war, it is premature for us to express our unqualified congratulations for the victory in Keren and Harar.

April 1941

XIV. WHAT IS HAPPINESS?

If there is any one question which is of equal interest to all men and women of all races and lands, it is the question which is the subject of my talk today. For there are as many aims as there are men and women, and unto each the question that is nearest to his or her heart. But behind all political passion and religious faith, beyond all poetic creation and scientific curiosity, can be found an endeavour to answer the supreme question of life: What is happiness?

Who can deny that everybody seeks his or her happiness—in his or her own way? The dying patriot is happy in the knowledge that he is offering his life for the freedom of his country. The religious martyr is full of exaltation in the midst of his suffering. The philosopher's delight is in the quest for truth, while beauty is the passion of the lover of art. For a man with a devouring passion—whether it be for art or philosophy, politics or religion, science or riches—the answer to the question is relatively easy. His one passion is the be-all and end-all of his life and his happiness lies in its fulfilment.

But what about the man who has no such consuming passion in life? What about the man who cannot perhaps afford the luxury of such an all-absorbing interest? Who can deny that the mills of economic slavery grind slowly but grind exceedingly small? Can the unfortunate many who have to go through the mill help subordinating all their interests to the one and all-devouring demand, the demand for the bare necessities of physical existence?

For those who live under the constant shadow of starvation and must ever think of how to fill the gnawing emptiness and hunger in their stomachs, is there any other happiness but that of physical content and well-being?

In the case of these persons, it is thus comparatively easy to say what is happiness. For those who have one single interest in life, their happiness lies in the fulfilment of their urge. For those who must strain all their energies merely in order to subsist, the satisfaction of the fundamental demands of life brings a sense of relief that is hardly distinguishable from happiness.

Happiness is more difficult to define for the average man, the man who has no flaming ideal or passion, but is interested in his own mild way in art and philosophy, and politics and religion, and, above all, in life. He is not immune from want and has his own economic worries but the spectre of destitution does not shadow all his waking thoughts, and hence the relief of physical needs alone cannot guarantee him his happiness. He is a member of that multitude who live above starvation but without comforts, and pursue an even and somewhat tedious round of common duties, hopes and fears. The interests of such men lie mainly in their jobs, their families and the limited social circle in which they move, and yet they are touched with enough of the influences of a larger life to be conscious of the limitations and poverty of their monotonous existence.

What is happiness for this large section who constitute one of the most, if not *the* most important group of people in India? Perhaps the number of those who live on the verge of starvation is even greater, but they are mute

and do not exert the influence on Indian life which their number justifies. And in any case, the dumb and hungry millions take their cue from this class of men just above them, men who share some of their deprivations but not their inert passivity.

Happiness for the hungry masses is easy to define, for we have already seen that to those who are famishing, the removal of their gnawing hunger is the first condition of happiness. As Gandhiji has so beautifully put it, 'To the hungry, even God appears in the form of bread.' But those who have bread, and perhaps little else, what do they understand by happiness?

Before we attempt to answer this question, one thing must be clearly stated, though perhaps it is implicit in what has been said before. What happiness is, may be difficult to say, but what it is not can be easily indicated. Luxury or physical comfort is not happiness but is not incompatible with it. Physical want or deprivation is also not happiness and, what is more, is incompatible with it. All talk about spiritual ecstasy or the contentment of a noble mind is merely an attempt to hide this fact. High thinking may be based on plain living, but at least the conditions of plain living must be secured.

Without the bare necessaries of life, no thinking, whether high or low, is at all possible. A person's views on happiness may be purely subjective, but there are definite objective conditions which must be satisfied before the subjective views can be entertained. The feeling of happiness may be a mental state, but at least the physical disabilities must disappear before this state can exist or flourish. It is easy, with a heavy bank balance, to speak

of the purifying effects of poverty and abstinence, but to the man who suffers from grinding poverty and must abstain from the pleasures of life, not because he wants to but because he must, such talk is singularly devoid of meaning. A surfeited man may be unhappy, but a starving beggar must needs be so. Physical comfort is not happiness, but the absence of acute physical discomfort is its indispensable condition.

This necessity of a minimum standard of material comfort explains why for the middle and the lower middle class, the one value which is more important than any other is the demand for security. They can, often precariously and with difficulty, maintain this minimum material standard and yet they know how very uncertain their position is. The slightest mistake on their part, or perhaps an accident over which they have no control, may hurl them from their insecure asylum into the ranks of those who suffer the agony of hunger, destitution and despair. They cling to their thin veneer of respectability, for they know that it is the only thing that distinguishes them from their fellow creatures who have human form and potentialities but live lives that are indistinguishable from the animal. What wonder then that for a man of this class, the first condition, if not the sum total of happiness is security: security in his job, security in his family life and security in the narrow social world he has built round himself? He senses the stresses and storms of the world outside, but his life-force is almost exhausted in the mere struggle for existence and survival. How shall he find the energy for delight in battle and the storming of heights as yet unattained by man?

Security then is the first condition, if not also the content of his happiness. He wants to be sure of his job and the maintenance it guarantees him. He wants to be sure of his family relationships and prefers dependable affection which will carry out the daily domestic duties to the ecstasy of passion which brings in its wake equal possibilities of efflorescence and decay. He wants to be sure of his circle of friends, men and women with similar interests and views, similar prejudices and ways of life and a similar tired tolerance of differences and idiosyncrasies.

The second condition of happiness for a man of this class is non-interference from any source: another individual, society or the State. He desires to be left alone. In a sense, this is only the obverse of his desire for security. He resents interference and is afraid of it. Though his life is pitched in a low key, he somehow manages to get along and would be content to continue in his staid if undistinguished course. Though dreams of advancement sometimes trouble his complacence, he is afraid to risk his little in the hope of greater gain. Even progress means a disturbance of the *status quo* and who knows what will happen once the crust of habit and custom is smashed? Once the process of change sets in improvement may result, but how to rule out the possibility of deterioration and ruin? His policy, therefore, is to let sleeping dogs lie and make the best of what straitened circumstances offer him. This mental make-up perhaps explains why revolutionaries have seldom, if ever, been derived from those who have a bare competence but little more. Aristocrats may become revolutionaries and so can the proletariat. Both the haves and the have-nots can afford to

take risks and dare, but the have-littles seek to cling to their slender patrimony with pathetic faith.

The average man of the middle class wants to feel secure in his modest competence. He also desires to be left alone and resents when anybody interferes in his narrow groove of life. Once these two conditions are satisfied, he can think of happiness as a positive value in his life. His job is perhaps at first only a means to his livelihood, but in time his job grows on him and he grows into his job. There is pleasure in the mere exercise of energy, and the more fluent the action, the greater the degree of pleasure. Pride in his work develops, sometimes a result of this increasing skill, sometimes a defence-mechanism set up by his mind to justify his life to himself and to others.

It is at this stage that family and social relations become positive sources of happiness in his life. To a hungry man, a family is doubly an encumbrance. It adds to his difficulties and continually reminds him of his inability to secure the comfort of those who are dear to him. But to the man who has solved the problem of sustenance, the family is a great source of happiness. The love of wife and child is itself a source of joy, for there are few things more pleasurable than affection freely given and returned. Also, the family is a small and separate world where he can feel his importance as an individual, a feeling that is particularly gratifying and life-giving after the experience of his insignificance in the world outside. To other men he is only one among many. Sometimes he is hardly an individual, but a mere factor in the process of social production or distribution. He feels like a prisoner of his

environment, a mere nobody without character or personality. Inside the family, all this is changed. He is a husband, a father or a son, the centre round which the life of the family revolves. He regains his self-respect and feels once more a human being with human hopes and fears and loves and hates.

In addition, the family offers him the opportunity of vicarious hopes and dreams and a chance to re-live his life in a manner that circumstances ruled out in his case. He plans for his children and through them he rights the wrongs he suffers in life and satisfies the hopes that remain unfulfilled. Disappointment may be his lot even here, but generally a beneficent providence saves him from the shocks of disillusion and despair. He can at least die in hope, even if life does not fulfil his dreams.

From the narrow circle of the family, a man's interest extends to the fellowship of men and women with a similar prospect and outlook on life. Petty jealousies born out of the feeling of insecurity, which often grows dim but is never fully extinguished, no doubt disturb such fellowship at times, but there is also the rich recompense of friendship, understanding and sympathy. Men's association with one another is in itself a source of joy when such association is free from the immediate demands of physical and economic needs. Communion with one's fellows is for a human being a fundamental and intrinsic impulse. It is only the fear of insecurity—which manifests itself in social life as the struggle for existence—that stands in the way of unhampered satisfaction of this need. Once such economic insecurity is overcome, the mere physical togetherness of men is charged with an emotion of abiding

joy. We want to share not only our sorrows but also our happiness. We also want to share a common peace: the projection in the sphere of mind of man's craving for security. Conquest of insecurity—physical, emotional and mental—is happiness for the common man.

April 1941

XV. RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Mr President, Sir, I believe that the House is doing itself an honour in considering and passing the resolution which has been so ably moved by the Leader of the House. This is not an occasion for long speeches. The time has not yet come when we can even attempt to appraise the genius and the work of Rabindranath Tagore. Today we have met here not to praise him but to mourn his loss and to place on record how much every citizen of Bengal—nay of India—is indebted to the great Poet. I think it is no exaggeration to say that the Bengal we know is what Tagore made it. What Bengal thinks and the language in which she thinks as well as the very content of her thought and imagination are the contribution of Rabindranath. Sir, ours is a land of rivers and we know that our country has been built up through the centuries by two great river systems. In a way Rabindranath can be compared to this river system. It was he who was the creator of the cultural life of modern Bengal. It is rarely given to any one single individual to lift the language of a province to the status of a world language. In the history of world literature, perhaps we find only one other, Dante, who like Tagore, elevated a provincial language to one of the greatest languages of the world. I think that in some ways the achievement of Rabindranath was even greater. He had to work against odds and in circumstances more difficult than in the case of Dante, and yet he made Bengali literature and language what it is today.

Reference has been made to his many-sided activities, in mourning his death and recording our sense of obligation for the contributions which he has made to the life of Bengal and India, and one might say, to the life of the world as a whole. It is this aspect, this variety of his many-sided activities which first comes to my mind. I think that the secret of his intellectual greatness, the secret of his great achievements lay in the integration of his personality which astonished and delighted every one who came near him. His interests were not confined to any one particular branch of human activities; they were not restricted to any special field of the achievements of man. He had taken for his sphere all that was human, even as the humanist of classical antiquity who said: I am a man, and nothing that is human is alien to me. Whatever was human, Tagore stood for it and fought for it, cherished it and strove to realize it in his own life and in that of his country.

Sir, I said at the very outset that it is very difficult at this time, with his death so near to us, to realize the full extent of the loss we have suffered in the death of the great poet. It is still more difficult to dwell at any length upon the different aspects of his achievement. We knew that he was dying, every one knew of his fatal disease, and yet when the news was flashed across Calcutta yesterday, we could hardly realize that he was no more. Ever since the time when we first learnt of his serious illness, we were anxious and now at last our anxiety is at an end in our terrible loss. The last two generations of Bengalees have been brought up on Rabindranath's teachings, have been thrilled by his thought and his writings and his

ideals. They have grown up in that atmosphere and cultural background which Rabindranath created in Bengal. And therefore when we suddenly learnt that he was dead, it was such a shock that we could hardly realize it. Mortal man must die and everyone must sooner or later run his earthly course; and yet when the news came, our spirits sank in deep despair. To the last he was so full of vitality and hope that he seemed the embodiment of life itself. How could such a one die who seemed to be growing before our very eyes even during the recent past? He had enriched Bengali literature in so many ways and in such rich abundance. And yet in his recent years we saw a new development, a widening of his mental horizon as ever new aspects of art and literature revealed themselves to his vision.

I have referred to the integration of personality, the fusion of the myriad aspects of life which is exhibited in the writings of Tagore. I think, Sir, that he is the greatest Bengalee who has ever lived. Reference has been made to the fact that he came of an aristocratic family and yet was not enamoured of his exalted birth. Is there anything surprising in this? He was one of Nature's princes to whom birth and station are but accidents. And yet, it was fortunate in a way that he belonged to the landed aristocracy, for it made it easier for him to absorb the great cultural traditions of medieval as well as ancient India without difficulty and without tribulation. The temper of the times in which he was born made it difficult for people from any other social group to do so naturally and with ease. He was born at a time when India was passing through the crisis born of the

impact of new ideas, the impact of the new European civilization, with all the turmoil and unrest that characterize such revolutionary changes. Almost before his eyes Indian life was breaking up into two disparate segments often bitterly at war with each other.

On the one hand, there were those who accepted wholeheartedly all that the West taught. For many of them everything oriental, our entire ancient heritage, was something to be condemned. They were men who thought that the culture of mediaeval India was something to be rejected and forgotten. Those who accepted without question and wholeheartedly the contribution of Western civilization flourished, and out of the contact with the new forces they built up the facade of a new culture. But severed from their own roots and cut off from the deep nourishing sources of indigenous life, they soon exhausted themselves. Many have noticed the brilliant and exotic but short-lived civilization which blossomed in the latter half of the last century. On the other hand, there were those who would have nothing to do with the West. They withdrew into their shells and in the incrustation of an ossified mode of life lost all vitality and power of growth. Even to this day there are pockets of obscurantism in the country which are not only moribund themselves but sources of infection in the life of society and the body-politic as well.

The secret of Tagore's vitality and strength lay in his easy acceptance of the triple streams of Indian life. He was born into a family which made it easy for him to absorb the cultural traditions of the nobility of mediaeval India as well as the spiritual heritage of the ancient past. And it was a

family withal that responded to the challenge of the West and accepted without fear or hesitation the new values that Europe brought to India. Of course, this combination of circumstances does not by itself explain the genius of Tagore, for genius is by its very nature inexplicable; but it indicates the background of his magnificent achievements.

Sir, reference has been made to Tagore's activities in connexion with the political life of his country. It is not surprising that a person with the exquisite sensitiveness of Tagore should respond to the sufferings of his people. It is not surprising that an integrated personality like Tagore's, whose interest covered every sphere of life, should also be interested in political activities. It was but a natural expression of his mind and character that he should throw himself into the political struggle and work for the freedom of his country, and by his lofty vision and nobility lift the political fight on to a higher plane of aspiration and achievement.

Reference has also been made by one of my honourable friends to a poem which, if I do not mistake, was published about forty years ago. This magnificent poem was meant for the people of Bengal and it defined for them their ideal of patriotism and freedom; but it also expressed a vision which holds true for all ages and climes. I think the people of any country in the world would be proud to pay homage to the writer of such a poem. Political activities, Sir, were but the natural expression of the integration of his personality, a manifestation of his indomitable spirit and of his sensitiveness, courage and devotion.

Whence was derived this phenomenal vitality and power of assimilation and growth that so astonishes us? I have referred to his family background and the happy fusion

of culture therein. From an early age, when he was about twenty years old, he went to live at Shelaida. Some of the most formative years of his life were spent in the heart of the country-side where he mixed with the people of the villages. He took them to his heart and entered into their life. Their suffering was his suffering, their joys were his joys and their sorrows were his sorrows. He made their cause his own, and in return he drew from the secret sources of their life something of his vitality, something of his energy. Ours is a rural culture and whatever creative energy we still possess has its roots in the rural life of our country.

In recent years a new note was becoming evident in his art. About ten years ago he went to Soviet Russia, and there he saw a nation's endeavour to build a new civilization on the basis of free labour. Tagore was primarily a poet—a visionary—but a visionary who worked for the realization of his dreams. He was not concerned with the petty squabbles of party politics, but in thought and word, in speech and deed proclaimed the dignity of labour and the equality of man with man. He wanted that there should be no barriers between mankind to prevent their living together as brothers and sisters, as fellow-sharers of a common heritage. His Visva-Bharati is widely known today as the visible embodiment of his ideals and of his recognition that if India is to live, she must live as a member of the comity of nations, as a member of the civilized communities of the world. He recognized no barriers, national or racial, geographical or economic, in the face of human suffering and human endeavour. Wherever there was distress, in China or in Abyssinia, in England or in India, in the mines

of South Wales or in the ranches of South America, his heart went out to them. His sympathy with suffering extended beyond the limits of his province or his country, beyond even his continent and he took the whole of humanity as his peer and comrade.

Sir, the history of the world tells us that politicians have their day and for a little while they strut and swagger upon the stage. But very soon the sands of time run out, and so does the sawdust with which they are stuffed. Where are the politicians of yesterday? Figures who dominated the scene for a while are all forgotten and all they stood and fought for consigned to oblivion. In time politicians and their posturings, and even the very activities and movements associated with their names are forgotten; but those who have contributed to the enrichment of the life of the people, to the quickening of consciousness in the human mind, those who have contributed somewhat to the alleviation of human suffering, they are not and shall never be forgotten. To whatever country they may belong, they are alike exalted and become the world's saviours—beacon-lights that shine through the darkness of the ages. It is my conviction, and I think it is a conviction which the whole House shares with me, that when the political turmoils of today are all forgotten, when the petty jealousies and conflicts, and our many disappointments and frustrations are all forgotten, the contribution which Rabindranath Tagore has made to the cultural heritage of mankind will for ever shine in the grateful memory of future generations.

August 1941

XVI. ON THE PERMANENT SETTLEMENT

Mr President, Sir, it is perhaps because the Permanent Settlement denotes the anarchy of individualism that we have also had an exhibition of individual anarchy in the speeches delivered in this House. More than one honourable member has spoken in open opposition to the mandate of his party. The two most delightful speeches which have been made are perhaps also the two most futile speeches. I refer, Sir, to the speeches of my honourable friends the Leader of the European Party and the Leader of the Coalition Party. I may be permitted to say that the speakers are, to put it mildly, living in a dreamer's paradise. Their speeches are entirely old-worldly, the relics of a receding past and a vanished social order. I shall deal with them as I proceed with my analysis of the Permanent Settlement and its implications.

I think the heart of the matter is to be found in chapters 2 and 3 of the first volume of the Report of the Land Revenue Commission. I largely agree with the strictures which have been passed upon the Commission by the Leader of the Coalition Party. I would draw the attention of the House to only a few paragraphs in these two chapters. On page 32 in paragraph 74, discussing the question of agricultural income the Commission say that the persons who enjoy the benefits of the Permanent Settlement have not contributed anything by way of income-tax, though it is quite obvious that it was not the intention of the framers of the Permanent Settlement that the people enjoying agricultural income should contribute

anything to the income-tax. Again, in paragraph 77 on page 33 and also in paragraph 81 on page 35 we find statements which, to say the least, are not borne out by the evidence placed before them.

In spite of all this, however, the Report proposes the abolition of the Permanent Settlement. I propose to read out only one passage from the Report, viz. paragraph 85 on page 38 of the first volume, and I think that that passage by itself is enough to dispose of the arguments advanced in favour of the Permanent Settlement. The Report is quite definite that there is a 'notable absence in Bengal of that certainty as to the respective rights and obligations of the parties which every sound and satisfactory system of land tenure should provide'. The very object of the Permanent Settlement was that it should give security of tenure to landlords as well as to tenants and determine their relations to one another and to the State, and also secure a proper revenue to the State. This one remark in the Report is enough to meet and demolish most of the arguments advanced by those who seek to defend the Permanent Settlement. I would also like to draw the attention of the House to the strictures of Lord Curzon in the Resolution of the Government of India in 1902, which has been referred to in the Report in paragraph 83 on page 36.

Before considering the case for State acquisition, I think it would be better to deal with the arguments against State acquisition, and examine for what they are worth the arguments cited in the Report as well as those advanced by the different members of the House. The arguments of the minority in the Commission may be

summarized as follows: The first argument is that the present economic deterioration of Bengal is due not to the Permanent Settlement but to the increasing pressure of population on the land. But the supporters of this view forget that the increasing pressure of population on the land was itself a result of the Permanent Settlement. The Permanent Settlement put an undue premium on investments in land and diverted the money available in the country from industrial undertakings. By this diversion of capital from industry, the Permanent Settlement led to the gradual decay and ultimate extinction of our ancient industries. Reference has been made to the statutes that were passed in England for the suppression of the industries of this country. That certainly was an important factor but of equal importance was the diversion of capital from industry to land. Unfortunately, that process is going on even today; even now, or at least till very recently, men of substance, men in the lucrative professions, such as barristers, lawyers and doctors, have been in the habit of investing their savings in land. This was due not only to a desire to own landed property but for reasons of prestige as well. Therefore, this increasing pressure of population on the land is itself very largely a result of the Permanent Settlement.

The next point brought out in the Minority Report is the question of uneconomic holdings and the right of alienating land. The supporters of the minority view hold that the economic difficulties of the cultivators of Bengal are due to the uneconomic size of their holdings. This is the result of excessive fragmentation; and the right of alienating their lands freely has only furthered this

process. The Mohammedan law of inheritance may also be responsible for the fragmentation, but it is only a contributory factor. I have no doubt that the chief reason for the poverty of this province lies in the increasing pressure of population on the land. If people had other avenues of employment and could engage their energies, initiative and enterprise in other avocations which promised them a decent income and an honourable status in life and society, then surely this kind of fragmentation of holdings would not have taken place. I think that before the economic condition of the peasantry can be improved, two other things will have to be considered. They are security of tenure and security against rack-renting—two things that are absolutely necessary for agrarian welfare. Our concern is to examine whether these conditions can be fulfilled under the Permanent Settlement.

The consolidation of holdings has been attempted in the Punjab and it could be initiated there only because there was State management. Perhaps it has not gone as far as it ought to have, but still attempts were made and this was possible only on account of State management. It is impossible for peasants and cultivators to agree to consolidation of holdings in the present conditions. But if the State takes the initiative in the matter and acquires the land, then consolidation and collective farming can be started on a co-operative basis. I may say in this connexion that in certain parts of India attempts are being made, of course with Government support, to encourage collective farming on a co-operative basis and help the peasantry consolidate their holdings.

The peasant must also be secured against rack-renting. It has been said that Bengal cultivators pay very low rents and that the rents in Bengal were much lower than in other parts of India. I would say that as a matter of fact rents are exorbitant and unprofitable, as is evidenced by the chronic default and progressive impoverishment of the peasantry of Bengal.

I was surprised to hear land placed in the same category as other agents of production, or compared with other commodities which change hands freely in the market. Land stands in a special category; it is not a commodity which can be circulated in the open market like other goods and cannot be conveyed from one place to another like other commodities. This has led many eminent economists to place land in a special category and take agriculture outside the list of ordinary professions.

Again, Bengal has been compared with Japan, and attention drawn to the low rate of rent in Bengal and her productivity. The condition of Bengal peasants has been compared with that of the peasants in Japan, and an honourable member was even pleased to remark that the condition of Bengal peasants was in some ways better than that of peasants in Japan. I am sure the Japanese will not agree with him nor the starving peasant of Bengal. The honourable member himself knows that he would rather be a peasant in Japan than a professor in Bengal.

Another point put forward in the Minority Report is that State acquisition would depress the position of the lower middle class. Dr Mookerjee also grieves over the fate of the poor rent-receivers. But according to paragraph 91 on page 40 of the Report, 2·25 millions are

dependent on rent collection as their only or chief source of income; and according to Dr Mookerjee himself, about 15 millions are dependent on rent-receipt for their livelihood. But the amount for distribution among them is in the neighbourhood of Rs. 8 crores. (Government have taken into account only the rent-receivers while Dr Mookerjee takes into account their families as well. There is, therefore, no real discrepancy.) If Rs. 8 crores are distributed among these 15 millions, the gross income per head would be only about Rs. 5 per annum. Therefore, if we take them in the lump, the loss of the poor middle-class rent-receiver would be only to the extent of Rs. 5 per annum. On the contrary, abolition of the Permanent Settlement would release the dormant faculties of a land-obsessed province and bring back initiative and enterprise into our industrial life. It is common knowledge that there has not been the same development of industries in our province as in other provinces. Our industrial backwardness is very largely due to the 'security-mentality' which is so prevalent here, and this in turn is the result of the Permanent Settlement.

Then we have to consider the opinion expressed by the minority on pages 40-41 of the Report. They argue that the meagre compensation which the middle-class tenure-holders will receive for the loss of their holdings will be insufficient to induce them to invest their money in industrial concerns. To this I can only say that there is a country called Scotland—which is also the country of origin of one of our honourable members who is of the same opinion—and there is a thing called the Joint Stock Company which it has perfected if not invented. They

do not have a Permanent Settlement in Scotland but all the same they have developed individual initiative and Joint Stock Companies on a scale which is perhaps unprecedented in the world.

Now as to the critics who wonder what will happen to the agricultural population if there is industrialization— for these agriculturists never go out of their villages. They seem to forget that conditions are rapidly changing and means of communication are making the agriculturists in Bengal as in the rest of India more and more mobile every year. With the growing mobility of labour, there is no reason why the surplus agricultural population of Bengal cannot be diverted into industries. They should also remember the experience of Bombay, the United Provinces and the Punjab in this respect. Have they suffered because they have no Permanent Settlement? Nor should it be forgotten that even today 18 crores of rupees are paid as industrial wages in Bengal.

The Minority Report has referred to another point, namely, the fear of reduction in rent on account of political reasons. That is not a danger but a necessity for reconstructing the economic life of the province. The present competitive rate of rent is exorbitant and uneconomic. It has been pointed out in the Report that the average person in Bengal is more heavily taxed than the average person in any other province except Bombay. This has had its repercussions on the position of the peasant whose condition has been continually deteriorating. The peasant pays not only rent but also directly through cesses imposed on him and indirectly through the jute tax and customs and excise in selling his one money-crop and

in purchasing articles which are necessaries of life. Therefore when we take everything into consideration, the burden of taxation on the agriculturist in Bengal is greater than he can bear. The incontrovertible evidence of this is the constant deterioration in his economic position and his continually increasing indebtedness. No doubt *salami* and *nazarana* have been abolished by legislation; but they will continue to exist so long as the demand for land is greater than the supply. These illegal exactions cannot be spirited away by statute. Once the Permanent Settlement is abolished and industries developed in Bengal, then and then alone will economic rent gradually emerge and only then can we talk of equity of rent between different provinces.

Now let us consider the case for State acquisition. I am quite conscious that the abolition of the Parmanent Settlement and the acquisition of the interests of all classes of rent-receivers by the State will not by itself bring in the millennium; but I would point out that such abolition will at any rate bring the State face to face with the cultivator and help him to stand on his own feet. It would make available to the State all future increments in land value. At present the zemindars enjoy all unearned increments. Subinfeudation is due to unearned increments and leads to the creation of parasitic classes. I do not refer to any individual but only condemn the system. A society in which there are so many idle parasites is in a most unhealthy state.

Secondly, if State acquisition is effected, there will be a more equitable distribution of the tax burden according to the principles of progressive taxation. At present, it is

just the reverse; the rent charges are heavier as we go down the scale. In fact the *pargana* rate is very low; a zemindar has to pay perhaps annas 12 or a little more. But when we come down to the *bargadar*, we find that he has to pay perhaps Rs.14 or even Rs.16 per acre. If the State by acquisition comes face to face with the cultivator, this regressive taxation will disappear.

The third point in favour of State acquisition is that it will release a considerable volume of capital and enterprise and thus help to create industries which will provide employment to many. It will also correct the present unfair discrimination in favour of land in matters of taxation and thus remove one of the major obstacles to the employment of capital for the development of industries.

Fourthly, the State will be in a position to assume responsibility not only for the land but also for the peasantry. It has been admitted that one of the main reasons for Bengal's backwardness in land improvement is due to the uncertainty in the apportionment of responsibilities. Proprietorship has been divided among various interests and agents with the result that we have not developed even the land available to us. To give only one example, 3·75 million acres of arable land still remain uncultivated in Bengal. They cannot be brought under cultivation, for nobody is willing to undertake the responsibility. If the State acquires all interest in land and becomes directly responsible for the welfare of the land and the peasantry, then large-scale reclamation measures can be undertaken which will change the face of the province. It has been pointed out that in Bengal we have only 7 per cent of the land under irrigation as against 54 per cent in the

Punjab. This in itself is a very fine argument in support of State acquisition of land instead of leaving it to the anarchical inclinations of individuals who are not only irresponsible but are also very often ignorant of their actual obligations.

Lastly, State acquisition of all landed interests would curtail litigation and save the cultivator from the harassment and complications from which he suffers today on account of the multiplicity of petty overlords. The present system of land tenure in Bengal is one of the most complicated in the world and involves not only litigation and economic loss to the peasantry, but also militates against the improvement of rural conditions as we have already seen.

On economic grounds, the case for the abolition of the Permanent Settlement and the resumption of lands by the State is unanswerable. I shall now examine the question of financial liability and the constitutional position. I propose to take up the constitutional position first and then examine the question of compensation. The financial position is intimately connected with the question of compensation and that in turn depends upon the constitutional issues involved. The problem of compensation I propose to examine from three different points of view—that of the individual and his right to compensation, the Government of India Act, and lastly the duty of the State towards its citizens.

The constitutional problem has been stated on page 42 of the Report and it answers most of the objections raised till now. A certain honourable member was very particular about freedom of contract and for his information

I shall quote a passage from the Leeds lecture of Thomas Hill Green on 'Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract' which was the basis of the entire tenancy legislation of Gladstone's Government in respect of Ireland. It was also the basis of his legislation with regard to Land, Health, Education and Prohibition in England. Says Green with regard to freedom of contract:

'If the ideal of true freedom is maximum of power for all members of human society alike to make the best of themselves, we are right in refusing to ascribe the glory of freedom to a state in which the apparent elevation of the few is founded on the degradation of the many, or to rank modern society, founded as it is on free industry with all its confusion and ignorant licence and waste of effort, above the most splendid of ancient republics.

'If I have given a true account of that freedom which forms the goal of social effort, we shall see that freedom of contract, freedom in all the forms of doing what one will with one's own, is valuable only as a means to an end. That end is what I call freedom in the positive sense: in other words, the liberation of the powers of all men equally for contribution to a common good. No one has a right to do what he will with his own in such a way as to contravene this end. It is only through the guarantee which society gives him that he has property at all, or, strictly speaking, any right to his possessions. This guarantee is founded on a sense of common interest. Every one has an interest in securing to every one else the free use and enjoyment and disposal of his possessions, so long as that freedom on the part of one does not interfere with a like freedom on the part of others, because such

freedom contributes to that equal development of the faculties of all which is the highest good for all. This is the true and the only justification of rights of property. Rights of property, however, have been and are claimed which cannot be thus justified. We are all now agreed that men cannot rightly be the property of men. The institution of property being only justifiable as a means to the free exercise of the social capabilities of all, there can be no true right to property of a kind which debars one class of men from such free exercise altogether.'

The principle enunciated by Green has been actually applied in England with regard to labour, education, health and specially with regard to land. The remarks of Green on land would have been specially pertinent to our problem today. But time does not allow me to quote any further extracts from his lecture. I shall only say that the special characteristics of land demand that it be acquired by the State before any other form of property.

Now I come to the question of compensation. In principle, I am opposed to compensation. So far as the right of the individual to compensation is concerned, I am against it for the following reasons:

Firstly, if expropriation took place, that was in 1793. I am not going into details about respective rights, but out of the conflicting evidence one thing is clear. Neither the State nor the landlord nor the tenant had an absolute right in land. All had a qualified ownership, and to that extent the Permanent Settlement gave new rights to the landlords by expropriating tenants.

Secondly, the landlords did not acquire estates for the sake of philanthropy and they have already made

sufficient and more out of their property. Nor can the landlords appeal to equity on this point because they themselves did not observe equity. The series of Tenancy Acts are in themselves evidence that the State thought that the landlords did not observe equity. Those who appeal to equity must come with clean hands and the landlords' hands are not clean.

Thirdly, as for improvements, if any, by landlords, they were effected to earn a return on capital and it has in most cases been amortised. Landlords capitalized the increment and walked away with it when they sold out.

Fourthly, if you take the question of hardship to recent purchasers, I may say that they certainly deserve our sympathy; but even they have no right to compensation. Like as in any other business venture, they have speculated in property and failed. Theirs is a hard case but so is the failure of every businessman. Like other businessmen, they too have no right to compensation.

It has been said that Section 299 of the Government of India Act, 1935, gives the individual a right to compensation; but if he looks at it carefully the landlord will find very poor consolation in it. Section 299 only provides that compensation must be paid but says nothing about the amount or principle of compensation. They are to be decided by the provincial legislature. But higher expediency or equity demands that the State must see to it that one section of its members does not needlessly suffer. The State must make provisions for the absorption of the landed classes into the economic life of the country as easily and smoothly as possible. Hence, after the right of the individual has failed, the duty of the

State steps in to provide for those who constitute its members.

The State must therefore provide facilities for the interim period. The Commission's recommendation of a flat rate of compensation is unjustified because the basis on which they made their calculations, namely, property, is wrong. We must provide for the interim period needed to allow the landed classes to adapt themselves to the changed times and become useful and productive members of society. A new set of rent rolls and record of rights, as recommended by the Commission, will enable the State to make the necessary changes in the flat rate of compensation and to pay annuities according to the needs of the parties.

The Land Revenue Commission recommends payment in cash but advances arguments which go against that recommendation. Such large-scale payments would disturb the money market and jeopardize industrial development. It would lead to wastage and extravagance and speculation, especially in view of the past habits of the landlords. I would suggest therefore that payment should be made in annuity bonds. The annuity bonds should be on the basis of half the difference between gross collection and the actual rent or revenue liability. Since the landlord is saved the hazard of management or collection, I think he would be quite willing to take 50 per cent of his present earnings, and the annuity would tend to approximate to that. In the beginning, 50 per cent of the difference between gross collection and rent or revenue liability should be allotted to the landlord; but this must be decreased by a fixed percentage every year so that at

the end of 25 years or so the annuity would be wiped out.

If the percentage saved every year is transferred to a reserve fund, the State would have at the end of this period, or even earlier, a huge fund for the development of industries. It could be utilized for irrigation, electrification, communications and housing, to mention only a few of the possible types of industrialization. And all these would employ labour and thus solve the problem not only of agricultural but also of middle-class unemployment. And for a space of 25 years the landed classes would have an interval during which they could adapt themselves to the changing social and economic order. The Permanent Settlement cannot function by itself and is bolstered up by the Court of Wards and by special legislative enactments and the grant of special facilities to landlords. If these are removed, in the course of a few years the Permanent Settlement would go of itself. This would apparently be a less drastic method of resumption because it would be more gradual and imperceptible, but in fact it would be far more drastic, for it would mean loss of estates without compensation or compassionate pensions in the shape of annuities as suggested in my scheme. It is for the landlords to choose their fate.

August 1941

XVII. FOOD CRISIS IN BENGAL

Sir, the special motion (on the food crisis in Bengal) as amended by me would read as follows:

'That this Council is of the opinion that the measures taken by Government for ensuring the supply of food, clothing and other necessaries of life at controlled prices require revision in the light of experience so far gained, and urges upon Government to declare Bengal a deficit province immediately and take such steps as may be necessary for ensuring the supply of a minimum quota of food and other necessaries to all persons in rural as well as urban areas, in consultation with the leaders of all parties and other prominent members of both Houses of the Legislature.'

I am sure almost all the honourable members will agree with me that the question which we are seeking to discuss in the House today is of such a serious nature and affects so vitally the life and in fact the very existence of the population of the province that no partisan attitude, no opposition or criticism for the mere sake of criticism should be allowed to influence the discussion. It is a question in which every member of the House has a serious part to play and a duty to perform towards the men and women of this province. Therefore, it is perfectly legitimate and not only legitimate but necessary, and the duty of the members of this House to offer criticism where Government may have gone astray and to make constructive suggestions wherever they are necessary; yet, at the same time, it is equally binding that the criticism

and suggestions should be made not in a party spirit but having regard only to the seriousness of the problem and the gravity of the situation.

As the honourable members will realize, the amendment that I have moved recognizes that the steps so far taken by Government have not proved adequate. I have therefore found it necessary to urge upon the Government the need of revising the steps they have taken in the light of experience so far gained, and in fact the statement placed before the House by the Hon. the Minister has also made it clear that Government, when they started dealing with the problem, proceeded in a tentative manner, and gradually as they gained experience, took steps to ensure that a sufficient quantity of food was available to the province. Therefore, there is agreement among both the opponents as well as the supporters of Government that this is a problem which requires very serious consideration. As regards the revision of the steps that have been taken also there is complete agreement; and I think members of the Opposition should not approach this problem in a spirit of opposition for the sake of opposition. If they attack the Ministry for mistakes that the Ministry themselves acknowledge and introduce bitterness and acrimony into the debate, we shall gain nothing, and we should only be wasting the time of the House in mere party squabbles. I would therefore urge the members of the Opposition to accept the amendment I have moved, as it recognizes the necessity of reviewing the situation and of revising the methods of dealing with it and also makes certain concrete suggestions.

I think it is imperative that at this stage a declaration should immediately be made by Government that Bengal is a deficit province, and I think that that is the position that has been established by the answers that have been given by the Hon. Minister to the questions that were asked in this place and in another place. I would also request the Hon. Minister to take the House into his confidence and tell us if it is not a fact that the departmental officers who have been placed in charge of this problem have submitted a report to Government that Bengal is now in a situation in which very soon a serious famine may overtake the province. Therefore, this question of whether there is scarcity or not, whether Bengal is a deficit province or not, will be answered by the Government themselves, and I believe that Government will be compelled by the exigency of the situation to declare Bengal a deficit province. If Bengal is declared to be a deficit province, then certain consequences will immediately follow. The first consequence will be that Government will have to stop all further exports of rice to foreign parts. If that is done, it will immediately relieve the situation to some extent. It will also give the Government of Bengal a handle to press upon the Government of India the necessity of persuading other provinces to sell rice to Bengal. A short while ago, there was a statement by the Premier of Assam that there was a surplus of rice available in Assam. In the papers I also remember to have seen that there is a surplus in Orissa as well. It is all a question—a difficult question, perhaps—of transport, and inter-provincial control, but if Government declare Bengal to be a deficit province, then

they can go to the Central Government with a good grace and demand that sufficient facilities should be given to them for importing more foodstuffs into the province.

Therefore, these are the two questions to which I would request a reply from Government. The first is whether it has been reported by the departmental officers that Bengal may very soon pass through a serious state of famine. The second is whether it is not a fact that even now large quantities of foodstuffs are being exported from the province. If that be the case, it aught to be stopped immediately Bengal is declared a deficit province. After this first step is taken, we would suggest certain other steps for a more equitable distribution of the meagre stock of foodstuffs that is at present at the command of Government. Arrangements should be made in different parts of the province to consolidate and distribute stocks. In the city of Calcutta the problem is very difficult, but an attempt to solve it must be made. In Calcutta, as also in other small towns in the province, Government must revise the present methods and adopt improved means. It is the experience of the members of this House that whenever there has been any control of any article in the recent past it has been followed by an immediate leap in the price of the commodity concerned. The reason is not difficult to understand. Without any proper control over the source of supply if the Government suddenly crash in and seek to control the market, the result is only an increase in price.

I will give you, Sir, a glaring instance of Governmental incapacity which occurred three or four days ago. With regard to certain articles Government announced that

they would be rationed in Calcutta. If Government had any intention of enforcing rationing effectively, they should not have published their intention till the scheme by which rationing could be enforced was ready. By giving out their policy before the scheme was ready and before the Government was prepared to enforce the scheme, they only frightened the dealers and made them force up their prices, because they thought that once rationing came into force, they could not have the margin of profit they had before. Now, as a result of this announcement on the part of Government the price of rice has risen by Rs.5 or Rs.6 per maund within three or four days. I would like to impress upon the Hon. Minister that until Government have got their scheme and their organization complete and ready, they should not allow half-baked programmes to come before the public only to frighten them and only to enable the dealers to make undue margins of profit. In support of my contention I have given one glaring instance, and this can be multiplied if necessary. Unless you control the source of supply, nothing can be done.

Then, Sir, I pass on to another glaring fact—I do not know if the Hon. Ministers and the Government have taken adequate notice of the fact that today although flour is not available in the market it is available if you go to the mills; there the workers are not only working full time, but they are working in two or three shifts daily. In the mills there is no scarcity of wheat. So wheat is available in the province; if it had not been available, then these mills could not have worked day and night—they cannot work on air; so wheat is coming into

Bengal from outside. My honourable friend informs me that this is army wheat. The army has a right to demand adequate food. But equally the people—the civil population—of Bengal have a right to demand adequate food for themselves, and that food should be supplied to them just as the army is being supplied. If the Government of India are not prepared to give adequate supply of rice and wheat to the Government of Bengal, then I would suggest an instrument by which the Government of Bengal can enforce its will. They should ask the Government of India to arrange to give Bengal supplies from outside the province and provide sufficient transport for the purpose. If the Government of India do not agree, the Government of Bengal must compel agreement by levying a municipal octroi duty on army supplies coming into Bengal. This is within the competence of the Provincial Government, and I am confident that if the Government of Bengal threaten any such measure, the Government of India will yield and supply such transport as may be necessary for the essential needs of Bengal.

I would suggest the following tentative scheme: I believe, in Calcutta, the Corporation grants a licence to every shop which exists in the city. We can thus get from the Corporation a list of existing shops, and I know that these are scattered in every locality. They come to the Corporation for a licence and also supply to the Corporation a statement of their annual transactions. So, by a mere reference to the Calcutta Corporation, the Government could find out what are the usual stocks, taking the average of the last three years, which these shops maintain. If the Government use the machinery of these

shops which have already got their organized staff to supply the daily requirements of the local clientele, they will be able to solve the problem of distribution easily. If supplies are made available to these shops at controlled prices, the shopkeepers would be able to distribute the foodstuff to the local people and Government might only keep a check on their distribution. Instead, what have Government done? We find today small children, and even infirm men and women standing in rows and queues and fighting with one another to get his or her quota of rice, flour, kerosene and so on. In this connexion I would like the Hon. Minister concerned to tell the House who was the officer whose inventive brain first concocted this diabolical scheme of supplying foodstuffs to one or two shops in each locality? Was it for the sake of extending patronage to only one or two shops and thinking that by so doing they would solve the problem? I suggest that Government should get the lists of licence-holders from the Calcutta Corporation and from those lists they would be able to know what is the out-turn of each shop per year and then Government might be able to supply those shops accordingly. I would suggest that the same sort of procedure might also be followed in the mofussil. It is not impossible for the District Magistrate or the Subdivisional Magistrate or the Circle Officer to find out what is the average sale of a particular shop and in this way the local people might be supplied with their requirements and Government would be able to avoid those unseemly scenes which we very often see in the long queues in front of one or two shops opened by Government in a locality. In the case of coal also, there are large-scale importers who

are mostly known to Government. The Corporation also issues licences to them, for without a licence nobody can carry on business in the city. Government have thus an instrument of control and they can very easily solve the difficult situation in which we find ourselves.

Then, Sir, the question may arise regarding the facilities for transport. In many cases it has been found that the difficulty is about transport and not so much about supplies. Sometimes it has been found that though supplies are available in one locality in another locality there may be a scarcity, because of the transport difficulties. In such cases, I would ask the Government of Bengal to insist on the Central Government to allot more wagons to Bengal. After all, civil supplies are as much necessary as military supplies. It is imperative that there should be a minimum amount of food and clothing available to the civil population and if that is not ensured, the possibility of dangers which are inherent in the situation might make administration impossible and serious consequences might follow. Therefore, the Government of Bengal should tell the Government of India that if they are not willing to give this Government the necessary priorities, they might be forced to impose octroi duties on the articles that come into this province for military purposes. They should threaten the Government of India with a proposal like that and also say that they would enforce this octroi duty on all military imports to municipal towns and localities of this province. The Government of India, I am confident, will allow the Government of Bengal wagons and such transport facilities as might be necessary. I think all honourable members of this House ought to

unite and put their heads together to solve this problem of food. I have therefore suggested in my amendment that leaders of every section and of every party in this House and also such representatives as are interested in the subject should be consulted in order to deal with the problem satisfactorily. Serious consequences might follow if the problem is not solved at once. It is for this reason that I have moved my amendment to the special motion, and I commend it for the acceptance of the House.

March 1943

XVIII. ON POLITICAL PRISONERS

Sir, I beg to move that 'this Council is of the opinion that the Government should immediately take the following steps for meeting the grievances of persons detained without any trial either under section 26 of the Defence of India Rules or Regulation III of 1818, viz:—

(*a*) Provision of study and examination allowances to those who are desirous of continuing their studies;

(*b*) transfer to one of the Calcutta jails of persons suffering from serious diseases;

(*c*) improvement in the terms of payment of family allowances providing a minimum of at least Rs.20 for each dependant of a detenu;

(*d*) expedition in the despatch of applications for family allowances or increment thereof;

(*e*) arrangement for the rapid payment of such allowances once the allowances are sanctioned.'

Sir, you will notice that this resolution is pitched in a very low key. I have not, in this resolution, raised the question of the release of the political prisoners or detenus. This is for the simple reason that the Government in their wisdom—without any reason whatsoever, without any legal justification whatsoever for the action they have taken—have seen fit to detain these people. I think it is in a way humiliating to us in India to go on continually appealing against a decision which is not a legal decision at all and is as good an illustration of Fascist methods as can be found anywhere in the world. I know that my

friends opposite will say that the Bengal Government is not primarily responsible for these arrests. They are largely correct. That is also another reason why I have not raised the question of their release. After all, we all know that in this matter the Provincial Government are not even in the position of agents; they are merely subordinates and carry out the orders of their Imperial masters who, in their wisdom, have seen fit to detain these persons. Therefore, till the actual political issue between India and England is settled, I do not think any useful purpose will be served by asking for their release. The day the political issue between India and England is settled, these men—not all of them, perhaps, but some of them at least—will be recognized and honoured by the nation. Until such a time comes, the least that we can do for them is to abstain from petitioning continuously for their release as some are doing today.

Sir, once the fact is granted that these prisoners are detained today without trial, it follows that the position of these persons is in a sense analogous to that of prisoners of war. This country has been engaged in a struggle for independence for many years and these persons have been detained because the Government which function today in India think that the freedom or liberty of these people is incompatible with the maintenance of British rule in this country. Therefore, the position of these detenus is really the position of prisoners of war. Sir, there is everywhere the civilized convention that prisoners of war are given certain privileges. They are accorded a certain standard of treatment. People who have not been convicted in a court of law can rightly claim similar treatment.

It will be noted that these prisoners have not been so convicted. They are now in detention, not because of any moral offence, nor because they wanted anything for themselves but because they thought it their duty to struggle for the independence of their country. This is true also of those who have been convicted of some political offence. Even then, I have left out their case and concentrated only on the case of those who without any trial whatsoever have been detained either under the Defence of India Act or under Regulation III of 1818.

It will also be noticed that the demands which I am making are not demands which this Government cannot satisfy. In the past it has been the convention for the Government of Bengal to grant allowances for study and examination fees to persons who have been detained in such manner. They have done so in order to enable the detenus to qualify themselves for earning their livelihood after release. I have received letters from persons from various jails. Some of them, putting it pathetically, say: 'After all, the war is going to end some day. Government cannot keep us prisoners for an indefinite period or for the whole of our lives. Let Government then give us the opportunity of using our time profitably, so that we can play our part in society with credit when we come out.' I ask Government to consider this question deeply and with sympathy and understanding. When they come out, will these young men become useful members of society? Will they be able to find a livelihood and occupy an honourable place or shall they come out of jail without any qualification whatsoever, without any means of improving themselves by education or in any other manner?

In the past, Government sanctioned study and examination allowances in order to enable these detenus and political sufferers to qualify themselves for honourable avocations when they came out. This was done even by the bureaucratic government of the past. Will the so-called popular Ministry do less than the old bureaucracy?

I do not understand why this time Government have refused this privilege. It is after all the minimum that Government can do for the persons they have detained without any trial—without any justification. I can mention many cases in which the petitions of persons who wanted to sit for examinations have been virtually refused. They were given formal permission but refused the fees; and without the sanction of examination fees, permission to sit for the examination is merely an empty formality. Government having deprived these unfortunate men of their liberty, should at least provide them with amenities by which they can become more useful members of society.

The second item of the resolution refers to the transfer to one of the Calcutta jails of persons suffering from serious diseases. I would again refer the Hon. Minister to the case of persons suffering from grievous diseases. In some cases, although transfers had been recommended by the local authorities actual transfers did not take place. I do not understand why this attitude has been taken up by Government. In passing, I would like to draw the attention of the Hon. Home Minister to the fact that this time there has been a special discrimination in the case of Muslim prisoners. They have to suffer special hardships,

it seems. Muslims detained since 1942 have been singled out for preferential, or shall I say, non-preferential treatment. I do not know whether it is intentional or not. Perhaps the British authorities do not like Muslims to take any part in the movement that is going on. Muslims, however, are not behindhand in spite of the so-called only Muslim organization of Mr Jinnah. That is perhaps the reason why Muslims who have been arrested in recent times have not received that consideration which every political prisoner aught to receive. Those detenus suffering from diseases that cannot be treated locally have not been allowed amenities to which every political prisoner in every country is entitled.

Then, Sir, I come to the third item in my resolution which refers to the improvement in the terms of payment of family allowances. The other day the Hon. the Finance Minister said that in some cases the allowances had been increased. I do not dispute that. But what is the increased amount they are getting? The magnificent sums of Rs. 10 and Rs. 15. If Government think these allowances are enough for the families of the detenus and political prisoners, I would ask them to consider what they would do if they were paid an identical amount per month for their families. After all, Government know very well that Rs. 10 will not buy even one maund of rice today. In many cases, these detenus and political prisoners have families to support. They are often the only earning members of their families. The difficulties of their families can be easily imagined. I am sure no Government, however unimaginative it might be, would for a moment take such steps if it once considered the implications of these

arrests. Very often it happens that these decisions are taken as a routine matter. It may even be that these matters do not come up to the Hon. the Home Minister or his associates at all but are disposed of by his subordinates. The cost of living has gone up by four or five times. In view of the enormous increase in the cost of living, Government should re-examine the case of detenus and other political prisoners and sanction an allowance of at least Rs. 20 per head. I have put the figure at Rs. 20 deliberately. Every honourable member knows that the cost of living per head is more than Rs. 20 today. It is difficult even to hire a servant for less. These prisoners have often occupied responsible positions in society. Many of them are the flower of our youth. Many have given their all and devoted the best years of their life to the national cause and their only crime is their love for the country. It was bad politics to arrest them. They could be arrested only under the present lawless laws. It is up to a Government which claims to be a popular Government, composed of Indians, at least to alleviate their distress. Ministers may have no power to release them; let them at least raise their family allowances to Rs. 20 per head, which may enable their families to maintain a decent human standard.

Then I come to the question of expedition in the despatch of applications for family allowances or increment thereof. I will not dilate on this point. The Hon. Minister himself knows that the Secretariate is proverbially slow. Files once started go on indefinitely. Like snowballs, papers go on accumulating till in the end the original point is altogether lost. A file goes on and on and at

last it reaches a point when it is found that the issue on which the file was started has ceased to exist. I would ask Government to take steps to see that the political prisoners or those who have been kept under detention without any trial whatsoever, do not suffer on that account. They would not have been detained thus by any civilized Government. Here they have been put into prison only to suit the political convenience of an alien Government who rule by force and not by willing consent. It is in the interest of such an alien Government to put them behind prison bars and to see that they do not come out till the international difficulties of the Government are over.

I now come to the last item—the arrangement for the rapid payment of such allowances once they are sanctioned. I think the Hon. the Home Minister will not deny that there have been cases where, even after Government had sanctioned certain allowances, the families of the detenus did not get them in due time. In some cases, months elapsed between the grant and the actual payment. In most cases, the sum was very meagre and inadequate. In many cases the prisoners who have been detained were the only earning members of their families. The sufferings of the families can, therefore, be easily imagined. I would ask Government to treat these prisoners in the only way possible to a Government claiming to be popular. Their only crime is their patriotism. Not one of them has been convicted. They have all been arrested on mere suspicion. And the suspicion is based on their patriotism. I hope the Home Minister will not forget the spirit of sacrifice, devotion and selflessness with

which many of these prisoners carried on their political activities so long as they were free.

In these circumstances, I would expect the Hon. the Minister to take an independent attitude towards this question and to tell us on the floor of this House that he would see that the grievances which I have pointed out are removed. I expect he will assure us that the families of these detenus who are, in effect, prisoners of war, will be given the facilities which any civilized Government would have given them......

Sir, in spite of the Hon. the Home Minister's assertion that I have pitched my speech in a high key, I maintain that I have kept my tone as studiedly moderate as I could. But I must confess that after some of the remarks which he has made, it is with a good deal of effort that I proceed to speak in the same studiously moderate tone. I do so because I want that these questions should be considered purely on merits without bringing in the element of passion which may easily come into a matter like this.

I shall take up the last comments of the Hon. Minister first. He referred to the trivial demands, as he put it, of the security prisoners in Dacca and Rajshahi, and dilated upon the trivial character of their demands. I am afraid, Sir, that he missed the tragic implication of their seemingly trivial demands. Of course, there are reasons why they did not put forward their other and more serious grievances. It is because they have been disappointed in their hopes. They felt that the Hon. the Home Minister, as the custodian of the law that is in being today, would pay no attention to their more serious grievances. They

also felt that the Hon. Minister, even if he had the desire, had not the power to do anything for them. They therefore did not trouble him by raising questions which would only prick his conscience without in any way allowing him to meet their demands. Therefore, when the security prisoners demanded that their old clothes should be sent to their families, I could see what the implication of their demand was. Any man with the slightest imagination would have seen the real reason why these political prisoners wanted their used clothes to be sent to their families. It is for the simple reason that they knew that their families, their brothers and sisters, their parents and children were practically half naked. I do not think, Sir, that the demand was quite as trivial or insignificant as the Hon. Minister has tried to suggest. And if these prisoners did not discuss with the Home Minister any serious grievances of theirs it is because they knew that the Home Minister under the present regime is not a free agent, that very often he has to carry out orders emanating from elsewhere, that if he wanted to exhibit any independence, it would not be tolerated—and they therefore presumably spared him. And I submit that the Home Minister should not build his case on that; rather should he build it on the human point of view.

Sir, I would like to point out that I have not asked for their release, for I hold that they are prisoners of war. As long as the issue between England and India is not settled, the question of their release is premature. But I do hold that when they are detained without any trial whatsoever, it is the duty of a Government which calls itself civilized, to see that they are enabled to maintain a

proper standard of life. At the outset I admitted that Government had made certain increases in the rates of allowances. But what I wanted to know was the actual net amount. If a man getting one rupee is given five or ten rupees, it is a 500 per cent or 1,000 per cent increase, but can a man live on five rupees a month? The point is the actual amount sanctioned. Is that amount sufficient in the conditions obtaining in Bengal at the present moment? That is the only test—not the percentage of increase. I have cited more than one case where the allowance sanctioned is not sufficient for the purpose, where it is considerably less than the price of one maund of rice in the open market.

The Hon. Minister has raised the point that the allowance paid should not be more than what the detenu was earning at the time he was taken into custody and that in no case should an allowance be given if at the time of his arrest a detenu was not earning anything. To that let me say that the cost of living has increased at least fourfold; in Bengal today any article or any sort of service has to be paid for at rates which are three to four times more than what they were a year ago. The Home Minister has referred to the pay of shop assistants and clerks. I for one have never defended low wages. We have always attempted to the best of our abilities to increase the minimum pay and allowance of shop assistants. The suggestion that because the clerks get less, the detenus should also get less is palpably untenable. To say that they should not get more than what they used to get at the time of detention is also unjustified. You cannot justify one wrong by another. The corruption that is

rampant everywhere today is due to the meagre incomes prevailing in these hard days.

The Hon. Minister has said that a person is given what he was earning at the time of his detention. What guarantee is there that a detenu, like others, would not have in the present conditions earned more? Government have taken him away from his normal avocation and shut him up without any legal justification. Reference has rightly been made by one of the speakers that these detenus could not appeal against their detention under Rule 26 of the Defence of India Rules and have it declared invalid by the High Court for want of money. For want of money they could not go up to the High Court in order to get the benefit of Regulation III of 1818, under which the rate of their allowances would have been somewhat higher. The position is that detenus and political prisoners have been denied the right of earning their livelihood or augmenting their incomes. Therefore, the onus is on the Government to increase the allowances proportionately to the increase in the cost of living. If they do not do so, the implication would be that Government's policy is to starve the families of these persons detained without trial. Government should make their position in this respect clear once for all. The Hon. the Home Minister cannot have it both ways. He cannot say that he sympathizes with the sufferings of these political prisoners and then permit detention to be punitive and not merely preventive. He has said he would limit the allowance to necessaries and not provide for luxuries. If the Hon. Minister thinks that in the year 1944 Rs. 20 could provide luxuries to the families of the detenus, I think he is living in a world of phantasy!

Another point the Hon. Minister raised was that the man who did not earn anything at the time of his arrest could not be given any allowance. The Hon. Minister was pleased in certain cases to depart from that principle. Here, I would remind the Hon. Minister of cases where people who did not earn anything before but are now earning considerable sums. There have been briefless barristers and hopeless ne'er-do-wells who have afterwards become leaders in trade and professions. There are instances of this in the history of other countries as well. How then can the Hon. Minister arrogate to himself the role of the Almighty and predict that because a person or persons were ne'er-do-wells at the time of arrest, they would not have been able to earn anything afterwards? The boys of whom the Home Minister is speaking might have been earning a lot in trade, commerce or industries today. They might have become successful in the different spheres of life.

I want to ask the Hon. Minister why he does not accept this resolution on the floor of this House. Why does he want to discriminate between one class of prisoners and another? It is dangerous to introduce discrimination of this type. It would create suspicion in the public mind that Government is making a distinction between one class of political prisoners and another. These people have different political affiliations, different political traditions and different political bias, and it would be dangerous not only to the Government itself but also for the future political life of the province to discriminate between them.

The Hon. Minister has spoken a great deal with regard to the study and examination allowances. He gave us

the benefit of his opinion that it is desirable that such prisoners should be helped to become useful members of society by getting higher education. I entirely agree with him. He also told us that the Government of 1937 went to great lengths in order to provide them with opportunities of becoming useful members of society. I only ask that the Government of 1937 should serve as an example to him in this respect at least. It is up to the present Government to do at least as much, if not more than the previous Government and prove that it is really a popular Government. Instead, the Hon. Minister merely tells us that the matter is under consideration!

There was one other point to which the Hon. Minister referred towards the end of his speech. He threatened drastic action against the detenus if they did not observe the Jail Code. I submit that this threat was quite unnecessary. These prisoners know quite well that they are under the Jail Code and that all the might of the British Empire is behind the Home Minister. The threat on the part of Government was quite unnecessary. These people know quite well that Government can take any action, if they so desire, against them. When the Home Minister assumed office, there was a *lathi* charge in one of the jails in Calcutta. It may have been merely an unfortunate coincidence but it may also have something to do with the attitude the Home Minister revealed today. When the Hon. Minister threatens drastic action against prisoners, I may tell him that these political prisoners are either persons whom Government suspected of actual political action—for they have no definite proof against them—or they are persons whom Government thought

capable of such political action. Since Government are not infallible, I think that there are at least some persons among those who have been arrested who have neither taken nor desire to take any political action, and are bound to be quite innocent of the charges which Government have seen fit to level against them.

March 1944

XIX. INDIA AND BURMA

Sir, in giving my general support to the object of this resolution I must confess that the wording of the resolution is, to my mind, not only unhappy but astonishing. My astonishment was increased when the Leader of the European Party added his words in support of the motion. We have been told that this war which is going on in Burma is for the liberation of the Burmans from the Japanese yoke but, I am afraid, the mover of the resolution and his supporter, the Leader of the European Group, think that it is for the reconquest of Burma. I think, Sir, that there is a world of difference between the 'reconquest of Burma' and the 'liberation of Burma'. I do not know whether the Leader of the European Group was speaking his real mind when he spoke of reconquest. Does he speak of reconquest in the case of France or Greece? Why then the difference in the case of Burma? Is it because Frenchmen and Greeks are white, while Burmans are only yellow? My only regret is that my honourable friend the mover should not have more sympathy with the Burmans, who are after all the shuttlecocks of fortune, bandied about by Britisher and Japanese. This doctrine of reconquest of Burma comes with ill grace specially from us. We are for the reconquest of no country but are only keen on liberating our own. This, I am sure, is the aspiration of every Indian.

Sir, that brings me to the second point which was stated both by the honourable the mover of the resolution and the Leader of the European Party. The mover

of the resolution stated that when Indians go back to—shall we call it liberated Burma?—I leave to my honourable friend the Leader of the European Party to find the correct term—they must enjoy the same rights as Englishmen. In other words, outsiders will decide what rights they will enjoy in the country and the local people will merely acquiesce. This is surely an imperialist version of liberation. I would prefer to call Burma liberated when, after the war is over, the Burmans have achieved their independence and are one of the free peoples of the world. The mover wants to dictate from outside what the status of the nationals shall be and the Leader of the European Party agrees. The mover wants that Indians should get the same rights in Burma as the subjects of the United Kingdom and again the Leader of the European Party agrees! I am sure you will agree that this is not very happily expressed. The subjects of the United Kingdom had certain privileges, privileges which were sometimes unjustified. I am as jealous of the rights of Indians as of the Burmans. When Burma is liberated, Indians must have exactly the same rights in Burma as are granted to nationals of other countries. But the Burmans must be the party who shall decide on what terms they are prepared to invite co-operation from outside. They must be the people with the final say in the matter.

Sir, I am not prepared to admit that Indians should have less rights and privileges than the people of any other country, whether it be the United Kingdom or the United States of America. But neither Indians nor Englishmen nor Americans must seek to exploit or oppress the people of the land. It somewhat mars the harmony

of talks of international brotherhood, freedom and democracy, when imperialists or their satellites talk of imposing upon Burma the conditions under which the subjects of the United Kingdom or Indians will go back. I would also ask my honourable friend the mover of the resolution to remember one fact. Have Indians the rights of a free people in their own land? Why talk of Indian rights in Burma when these rights are not recognized in India herself? To assert our rights in Burma, we must first achieve our own independence.

Indian indentured labour played an important part in the development of South Africa and the Crown Colonies, but we find that after they have contributed to the prosperity of the land, they are not in the picture at all. They have been expropriated and repatriated—they have been treated as worse than human beings. When therefore the motion is put in the form in which the mover puts it, I must confess that I am not happy. How shall I be assured that even if Indians are promised all manner of rights today, those promises will not be repudiated tomorrow? A strong and independent India alone can protect the rights of her nationals—hence the right move to secure Indian rights in Burma is to work for the achievement of Indian freedom.

I must also make a passing reference to one remark of the Leader of the Coalition Party in this House. I am very glad to find that he believes in the indissoluble unity of Burma and India. It is rather surprising to hear this from a person who does not believe even in the unity of India—a person who believes that India should be carved out into two, three or four separate *sthans*. I am very

glad to find that my honourable friend has transcended the limitations of the political party to which he belongs. Even though I do not agree with the imperialistic part of his speech, I certainly agree with what he says of Indian unity. He goes further and speaks of the identity of interests between Burma and India. Such sentiments should be more widespread. There is a great identity of interests between Burma and India, but certainly not greater than that between what his party calls Pakisthan and Hindusthan!

My honourable friend also spoke of the indolence of Burmans. Without the help of Indians, he said, Burmans cannot run the affairs of their own country. Sir, I almost thought I was listening to an Englishman speaking about India. The Englishman also tells us that he is here because we, Indians, are indolent and without his help we cannot manage our own affairs. We have heard much about the white man's burden. We know what it is to our cost. The world today is getting tired of the white man's burden which he transfers to the shoulders of the nearest black man. Today, in this House, I think it was for the first time suggested that there is also a black man's burden and that that burden would be imposed upon the poor nationals of Burma.

Sir, I would sum up the position thus: We want Burma to be liberated. We want the Burmans to have the main say in determining what shall be the constitution of their country. It is for them to decide the conditions under which others may come and trade with them or settle down in their land. There should be no discrimination and Indians shall not be treated differently from any

other race or people. Indians must have the same rights as the people of other free countries. All these can be achieved and guaranteed only if India herself is free. If she is to depend on the good offices of others to secure for Indians their rights in Burma, I am afraid, all the good resolutions of my honourable friend the mover and all the benedictions of my honourable friend the Leader of the European Party will be in vain.

October 1944

XX. STUDENTS AND THE FUTURE

It is almost a truism to say that we meet today at a very critical moment. So far as the student movement is concerned, we are meeting after a lapse of several years which have seen cataclysmic changes not only in the world outside but also within India. The outbreak of war and its repercussions on the sluggish current of Indian life have affected every one of us in our personal and individual capacity. The impoverishment and degradation of the country that has been going on for almost two centuries has been accelerated by the impact of war to an alarming extent. Half-starved, ill-clothed and miserable, millions of Indians have experienced degrees of hunger, disease and nakedness which were undreamt-of even in this country. Over all our activities has loomed the shadow of a war in which we were mere spectators, or even worse, the passive instruments of other people's will and decisions. August 1942 and all that is associated with it stands as a watershed that divides with irrevocable finality the stream of Indian political life before and after.

It is quite evident that after the events which have taken place in the last two years, things can never be as they were before. Perhaps we are living in abnormal times; but even if this be conceded, the return of normality will discover a new mood and temper in Indian political life. Students responded to the call of August 1942 as perhaps no other group of people in India. If the response from organized labour and the peasantry had

been at all commensurate with the daring and sacrifice shown by the students, perhaps the history of India in recent years would have been different. To the many heroic spirits who dared their all and paid the supreme price for loyalty and patriotism, we can only offer today our tribute of admiration and reverence.

It has become almost a fashion today to speak of the spirit of frustration which prevails all round. It has become customary to say that August 1942 was a mistake and that mistake must be remedied at any cost. There are politicians who feel that if the country could only be taken back to the time of the Cripps offer, everything would be all right. They feel that the mood of despondency which obtains in the country today is largely responsible for the atmosphere of inactivity and passivism which is paralysing our national life. The corruption, inequity and chaos which we find in every walk of Indian life is, according to these critics, a result of the defeatism which has pervaded the country since the failure of the August Revolution of 1942.

I confess that I cannot agree with the diagnosis of many of these political physicians. Nor can I consider the August Revolution of 1942 a tragic failure. Failure and success are relative terms. In any movement which seeks to transform the very basis of the life of vast millions, total success can hardly be achieved. Even where there is only partial success, such success is always an opening of new horizons and a challenge to further endeavour. In the case of the Indian struggle of 1942, he would be a bold man indeed who could say that the qualities of heroism and sacrifice exhibited by the nameless

millions have been all in vain. Perhaps the movement did not succeed in its immediate objects. It should be our duty to discover the reasons for such failure. But on the other hand can any one deny that this movement has trained vast bodies of people in disciplined and non-violent action on a scale unprecedented in the history of the Indian national struggle? Whenever there is intense activity in any field, a period of lassitude must necessarily follow. This is nature's own remedy for replenishing the reserves of energy which have been exhausted during the struggle. As students of political movements it is your duty to look at this ebb and flow in national life with detachment and equanimity, and from a study of these fluctuations prepare yourself to take greater advantage of the opportunity when the next flood-tide occurs.

Individually and in your personal capacities, you may feel somewhat disappointed that the sacrifice and effort of so many devoted men and women has not yet had the success that was hoped for. As students and workers in the political movement, however, we have no right to despair. But on the contrary, we must by searching self-analysis prepare ourselves for achieving better results next time. I shall not enter into any discussion as to whether the August Revolution was a Congress movement or not. This much is certain, that if Gandhiji had the opportunity of initiating and conducting the movement, he would perhaps have done so in a different way. It is however equally certain that the numberless men and women who participated in the movement and made the supremest sacrifice of which a human being is capable, did so in the firm belief that they were only carrying out

the implications of the August resolution of 1942. It must also be said that in the speeches delivered during the momentous session of the A.-I. C. C., speaker after speaker emphasized the need for the individual to act according to his lights within the limits imposed by the resolution. Gandhiji himself said that everybody must act as if he were a free man and must decide for himself how he should function freely in a free India.

It seems therefore that in spite of opinions to the contrary from even the highest quarters, it is merely academic hairsplitting to say that the August Revolution was not a Congress movement. There is another point to be considered. If no movement is properly a Congress movement unless the leaders have definitely chalked out every blessed detail of the programme and sent it out to the people with their instructions on every minute point, it is to be feared that there will never again be a Congress movement in the future. Congress functions in an open way and it is an organization for open rebellion. In 1921 and in 1930, the British Government miscalculated the strength of the Congress and therefore allowed the leaders to frame their policies and publicize them. After the experience of 1930, when Government realized that if a Congress movement initiated by Gandhiji is allowed to mature and develop, it acquires almost irresistible strength, Government decided to change their policy. In 1932, before the Congress executive had been able to come to any decision, even before Gandhiji had returned from London after attending the Second Round Table Conference, the Government had already taken the necessary preventive steps. The same thing happened in 1942 again.

Government struck without giving Gandhiji an opportunity of organizing the forces of the nation before launching a non-violent war. If the movement of 1932, in spite of the absence of any specific directions from the Congress executive, was a Congress movement, how can one say that the movement of 1942 was not a Congress movement simply because specific directions were not issued by the High Command?

Then there is the issue of violence and non-violence. Critics of the 1942 movement have tried to condemn it on the ground that it did not keep within the limits of non-violence laid down by the Congress. These critics often forget that just like success and failure, violence and non-violence are also relative terms. Absolute violence is as much a negation of reality as absolute non-violence. In fact, the concept of absolute non-violence is self-contradictory. Non-violence simply means the use of the least possible violence compatible with the circumstances. It is in this sense alone that we can give a meaning to the concept. Even Gandhiji had to kill an incurably ailing calf as this was the only means of sparing it unnecessary pain. Can any one say that in the face of the leonine violence of the Government, the Indian people exceeded their limits in 1942? And in any case, was the occasional sporadic violence of 1942 any greater than the sporadic outbursts in the movements of 1921, 1930 and 1932?

The whole condemnation of the August Revolution therefore rests neither on the origin of the movement nor upon its alleged violent nature but on the international background in which it took place. In 1921, 1930 or 1932 there were international crises but these did not

threaten the very existence of the British Empire as in 1942. The intensity of the reaction of the British authorities in India can therefore be understood. In spite of the Congress declaration of opposition to all that is represented by German, Japanese or British fascism in Europe, China or India, in spite of the fact that Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru has been a more consistent fighter for democracy and human rights all over the world than all the British Cabinet Ministers put together since 1931, in spite of the fact that the Indian people had learnt the terrible cost of foreign occupation and exploitation through a hundred years of slavery and could have no possible reason for wanting to repeat the experience—in spite of all these factors, the British authorities in India aware of the strength of Indian aspirations for freedom and democracy for India as well as for the whole world, took advantage of the critical war situation to adopt measures which otherwise would have exasperated even the phlegmatic average Englishman.

Government condemnation of August 1942 is easy to understand, but what about that of those Indians who seek to sail in the same boat? Is it because according to them the war which was being fought was throughout a People's War? I think hardly any comment is necessary on this point today. He would be a very bold man indeed who could say at this stage that the present war is being fought for the people's rights. He would be a bold man who could say that the British in Greece are defending freedom and democracy against fascism. It would require an equally bold man to say that it was in the interests of freedom and democracy that Stalin connived

at the murder of over 2,00,000 Polish patriots who had risen against Nazi tyranny in Warsaw. It would be a bold man indeed who could say that in Italy, France and Belgium, all the militant elements who had resisted the Nazis during the darkest days of the present war are being systematically and ruthlessly liquidated in the interests of freedom and democracy. I have always held that of the many characterizations of the present war that of President Roosevelt was easily the best. For once Mr Roosevelt showed himself a clear-sighted realist when he said that this was a Tyrants' War.

It is not necessary for me to enter into a discussion about our communal differences and the hundred and one other difficulties which pious Britishers trot out in order to oppose India's inalienable right to freedom. Supposing all these difficulties do exist, how does that justify the continuation of British rule in this land? They have been here as a sovereign power for almost a century and a half. Not even their blindest admirer can claim that they have succeeded in solving even one of the problems confronting us. If the British have not succeeded in all these hundred and fifty years, what reason is there to think that they will succeed today? In any case, they have had their turn and they have not only failed in solving the problems but have succeeded in exacerbating communal feelings and divisions among the different sections of the people. Is it not high time that they gracefully quit this land in order to give the people a chance of settling their domestic differences by themselves?

We all know that it would be idle to expect such a happy solution of the tangled Indo-British relations.

With or without justification, for good or for ill, the British Imperialists will stay here as long as they are able to. Nor would it be reasonable to expect or accept any help from any outside source. Friends who come to help often remain to rule. That is what the Greeks are finding to their cost today. Fond expectations of Russian help or American intervention are therefore doomed to failure. If India wants to be free, she must be free by her own right and by her own strength, though of course this does not mean that she should be blind to the international background against which her struggle for freedom is being carried on.

Here there is one slender ray of hope provided we Indians are able to utilize the opportunity offered. International jealousies will not disappear with the cessation of hostilities. Already a third world war is taking shape in the womb of the second world war. Anglo-American, Anglo-Russian and Russo-American clashes of interest can hardly be concealed even during the pendency of the war. The prospect is frightening to the common man, and all over the world he is getting more and more tired of fighting the wars of his capitalist and imperialist masters. Even in England, the average Englishman feels today that the horror, misery and degradation of a world war every twenty years is too high a price to pay even for a world empire. There is therefore a chance that if the Indian people can achieve their independence today, the average Englishman may refuse to fight to restore the imperialist domination over India. This however is only a hope and in any case it can materialize only if Indians first achieve their independence. It would be too much

to expect the average Britisher to fight for India's freedom. All that we can hope for is that he will refuse to fight to enslave India once she has become free.

If then we ourselves have to achieve our own independence what is the role that students can play? I have already said that the students have always played a magnificent part in all the struggles that have taken place till now. But they have done so only as passive instruments, not as conscious agents having a voice in the shaping of policy. I do not suggest that students should usurp the role of national leaders, but as organized conscious elements in the national life they owe a duty to their country and to themselves to examine the policies decided upon from time to time. This they can do only through a heightening of their own individual consciousness and the establishment of closer links with the people at large. I think you will not deny that on both these points there is much room for improvement, both in the student movement as such as well as among student workers individually.

Our student organizations have not as yet become alert centres of awareness where national experience can be enriched by contacts with fighters for freedom in other lands. The intimate interplay of economic, social, political and ideological factors makes the modern world a complex organism where skill, intelligence and knowledge are essential if individuals or nations are to play their part with credit. I ask you to examine for yourselves how far, as members of an organized student body and as individual students, you have contributed to this deepening and enrichment of your own personalities.

The other point to which I have referred is perhaps even more pressing. Can any one deny that one of the chief causes of weakness in our national life is the artificial and unnatural gulf between the so-called educated classes and the vast multitude of the illiterate masses? Our education, instead of making us the natural leaders of our people, often tends to denationalize us and impoverish our lives. This gulf between the educated and the uneducated must be bridged if the relatively conscious educated classes are to succeed in organizing the strength of the inert masses for achieving national independence. Can we deny that there is today among labourers and peasants a half-articulate suspicion of all literate and educated people? Again I ask you to consider what, as individual students and as members of a student organization, you have done to overcome this barrier and bridge the widening chasm which threatens to divide Indians into two completely different nations?

I have often felt that one of the reasons why our national endeavour has not yet achieved the success which the energy, sacrifice and devotion of our workers entitle us to expect is this loss of unity between the educated few and the illiterate many. Even the Congress, one is forced to say, is not free from blame in this respect. The election programme which was placed before the country in 1936 was a legislative formulation of the minimum rights assured in the Karachi resolution of 1931. Have these measures been carried out? If they had been, is there any doubt that the mass backing of the Congress would have been far greater than it actually is today? Can it be denied that if the economic and social measures mentioned

in the election manifesto had been carried through many of the unfortunate communal and provincial differences which have cropped up subsequently would have been scotched at the very beginning? The students responded magnificently to the call of August 1942. Can we say the same of the peasantry and labour in their organized capacity? The right to food and work, the right to clothing and shelter, the right to education and the right to free medical services when ill are inalienable rights of the individual in a free society. How far has the Congress during the years it was in office striven to realize these objectives?

It is a happy sign that in his recent speeches and writings Gandhiji has said that the Congress must concentrate on organizing labour, peasantry and the students. If the new programme of the Congress is carried out—and there is no reason why it should not be—there will be such an accession of strength to the national organization that its struggle for the realization of independence will become irresistible. I am not one of those who believe that all is lost simply because in August 1942 Indians did not succeed in all that they had aimed at. Again, and perhaps sooner than many of us realize, another opportunity may arise with the cessation of hostilities. In spite of the many evils which the present war has brought to India, there are two features on the credit side which must be regarded as beneficial. The influx of large numbers of white troops, many of them not as yet contaminated with the taint of imperialist domination, has created in the mind of the Indians a sense of equality with the white man. The white man's superiority has gone perhaps for ever,

and even the average Indian villager feels it. The second redeeming feature is the enforced raising of the standard of life and discipline of several millions of Indians through participation in military and semi-military activities of various types. Millions of Indians who normally did not have one square meal during their whole lives have been brought up to expect four satisfying meals a day. After the war, they will not relapse into their former condition of semi-starvation, semi-nakedness and destitution without a bitter struggle.

If then in the intervening years, a conscious student movement can organize the country's peasantry and labour with a Peasants' and Workers' State as their objective, the cessation of the war will again offer an opportunity for the achievement of Indian independence. I lay special emphasis on this point as the achievement of Indian independence is an indispensable pre-condition for the realization of socialism in a free world. In that task of organizing the peasants and the labourers of India, the student movement can play a glorious part. You will justify yourself only in so far as you can turn yourself into the instruments of destiny by deepening and enriching your own personalities through an intense intellectual discipline and a profound emotional identification with the inarticulate aspirations of our numberless millions.

December 1944

XXI. EDUCATION AND NATIONALISM

It is admitted on all hands today that the present system of education in India requires a thorough overhauling. The educational structure is obviously crumbling. Education has in many aspects lost sight of its objective. Even the main purpose of education has not always been understood aright. If the purpose of education is to develop the individual to his fullest capacity, its reference to the social background can never be ignored. To fit each man for his place in society and to make society as a whole progressive are the real tests of a successful educational system. Judged by both these tests, the present system of education in India has failed.

We cannot deny that the education we receive and impart fails to meet the demands of our individual or our social life. Nor can it be denied that this educational system is an exotic growth without roots in the past history and traditions of our people. It was introduced primarily for the convenience of our alien administrators. The old traditional modes of education were discarded not because they were useless or effete, but because our foreign rulers had no use for them. The British educationists of the day looked down on our educational standards and ideals. Macaulay went so far as to say that a single shelf of English books was worth more than all the accumulated treasures of Sanskrit, Arabic or Persian literature. It was inevitable that such persons should delight in discrediting and discarding the old values and ideals of the land.

Even the main purpose of education has not always been understood aright. The rejection of traditional values started a process of disintegration in individual and social life. This was accelerated by the fact that they were replaced by no new ones of an organic growth. If new values had been substituted as demanded by the changing times, that would only have proved a source of strength and not of weakness. Unfortunately this did not happen. The new system which replaced the old paid little heed to the needs of the community. It was based on the requirements of a foreign administration whose only concern was the exploitation of the resources of the land. Even the maintenance of law and order derived its urgency from the need of tranquillity for successful exploitation. The result was that education, instead of being built broad-based upon the needs of the community, was imposed from above like some alien growth. The British needed clerks and assistants—men who could help them in the administration of the country as well as in its commercial exploitation. All that was needed for the purpose was skill in the use of the English language. Development of the intellect was not essential, and might even prove to be a hindrance. Once the mind began to function, it might start asking uncomfortable questions. Proficiency in English and the acquisition of information were the two chief objectives of this new system of education. It did not teach the pupil to enquire and question—it taught him to understand orders and carry them out with unquestioning obedience. Nor is this surprising. True education is incompatible with an imperialist regime. The spread of literacy in India

therefore has not been synonymous with the growth of education.

A system that looked to the interests of an alien rule could not but hamper the growth of education in the true sense of the term. It was not content with making an alien language the medium of instruction. It went still further and made the medium itself the end of education. This confusion of means with ends has defeated the purposes of education at every step. The ruinous consequences thereof are evident even today in spite of recent attempts to liberate education from the bondage of an alien medium. The burden of language has been somewhat lightened in the high schools, but the old superstitions die hard. Even today, young and growing minds are crushed under a weight of information that leaves little scope for freedom and spontaneity. Proficiency in English is no longer an end in itself but the acquisition of information still remains the aim of education.

The main criticism against the present system of education is that it saps initiative and induces meek submissiveness. It teaches us to carry out orders but gives no training in the art of command. This has led to a weakening of the national character and made us unable to face the challenge of life. The present system of education has merely discarded old values and undermined old traditions. In a country so conservative and custom-ridden as India, this would have been a positive virtue to some extent compensating for the weakening of national character. Unfortunately, however, the revolutionary possibilities of the new education were nullified by its division of society into two opposed camps of the literate and the illiterate.

Economic and political bondage holds our country in its grip. The people are inert and lacking in vital energy. (The prosperity and civilization of modern England is based on our hunger and nakedness.) The cup of our misery and humiliation is full to the brim. But it is only the disciplined energy of the masses that can shatter our chains and bring the promise of a richer life. Neither exploitation nor tyranny can stifle the sources of the terrible power that lies dormant in the masses. But force is always blind. It can smash all obstacles in its path, but it can also create new barriers. It is our misfortune that in Bengal the energies of the masses have been evoked not for emancipating them from political, economic or social bonds but for forging new fetters.

This has been possible on account of the bifurcation of social consciousness to which we have already referred. To my mind, that is the gravest defect of the present educational system. It has created a gulf between the literate and the illiterate. It has made the former vain, conscious but powerless while it has made the latter inert, unconscious and aimless, with the result that neither section of society is capable of intelligent and sustained effort. The divorce between the knowledge of the classes and the power of the masses has so degraded us that today our only measure of value is worldly success in terms of money.

Communal squabbles today disfigure the Indian scene, but they too are symptoms of our economic and political bondage. The misdirection of our education can also be traced directly to this factor. Is it surprising that for lack of education and enlightened ideals, the blind energy

of the masses should express itself in communal frenzy? All over the world the literate few attempt to exploit the illiterate many for their own ends. Great social ideals are achieved when the power of wisdom directs the energy of the masses. When knowledge defines the objectives and the masses supply the power for their realization, we have the conditions for sure and certain progress. In India generally, and in Bengal in particular, the contact between the two has been sundered. The power of knowledge defeats itself through individualist self-centredness, and all over the country we find that the educated classes are defeatist and despondent. The power of the masses is blind and aimless and expresses itself in wild outbursts of emotion that only too often take the form of communal hatred and conflict.

Imperialist encouragement of communal differences is now an admitted fact. The sharp cleavage between the literate and the illiterate is another manifestation of the same policy of divide and rule. This cleavage did not exist in Bengal before the advent of the British. The prevalent system of education was suited to the social, economic and political requirements of the times. We are told that there were about 80,000 primary schools. Each social layer had its appropriate educational service. Technical and literary education may have been separate, but this separation had no communal basis. The bifurcation of social consciousness which characterizes Bengal today was therefore unknown in those days. After the acquisition of the revenue rights of Bengal, the first task the British set themselves was to undermine and weaken the literate and cultured sections of the Muslim

community. The Permanent Settlement was the first overt act towards that end. The resumption of properties was the second step. Macaulay's reform of the educational system completed the process and sowed the seeds of the communal bitterness of today.

The result of the first two steps was to impoverish the Muslims and cripple them economically. The third step reduced them to the ranks of the illiterate. They were not however the only ones who suffered. The destruction of the indigenous system of education and its replacement by another which aimed chiefly at the acquisition of English increased the number of the illiterate while it widened the gulf between the literate and the illiterate. This new education proved immediately lucrative so that difference in wealth was added to disparity in knowledge. For reasons into which we need not enter here, this education was confined primarily to the caste Hindus of Bengal while all the others stood aloof and suspicious. To the differences in knowledge and wealth was added a common cleavage that proved disastrous to the future of Bengal. This explains why to this day the masses have not responded properly to the challenge of the political, economic and social movements that have swept the land.

There is no future for us unless we can harness to the tasks of national regeneration the colossal forces lying dormant in the common people. To awaken the masses and organize them, to instil in them a sense of discipline and purpose, and to direct the energies released along desirable channels: these are tasks which demand the highest vision, idealism and statesmanship. Economic

regeneration is impossible without achieving political power; and without a just and equitable economic order, all social evils are bound to persist. Political power can be achieved only through the conscious and organized power of the masses. The evocation of such power demands the obliteration of the cultural and communal differences which today divide and weaken the people. The gulf between the literate and the illiterate must be bridged, and the sooner the better for all concerned. The levelling up of the different sections of the community is therefore a prime necessity, and must be achieved even if it leads to temporary discontent or apparent injustice through the preferential treatment of weaker and backward sections.

It must be remembered that the danger lies not in such preferential treatment for bringing up to a common standard the various elements of the people of the land, but in the creation of new differences in culture and outlook among the educated sections of the public. If the literate of the land are divided into communal camps, the energy of the masses will be diverted from the struggle for national freedom into the fight for communal rights. The rapid spread of literacy and education is tending to remove distinctions within each community. The inequality between the communities is also tending to disappear. The time is fast approaching for the united strength of the people as a whole, regardless of communal or cultural differences, to be directed towards the achievement of political freedom. This is exactly what the imperialists and the representatives of vested interests fear most. They are therefore straining

every nerve to create new cultural divisions which will divert our energies into futile internecine quarrels. Various communal bodies which have grown up like mushrooms since the inauguration of provincial autonomy are evidence of the success of such imperialist tactics.

The history of India for two thousand years and more has been a history of syntheses. Perhaps nowhere else in the world has there been interpenetration of cultures on such a vast scale. In literature and language, in customs and traditions, in art and culture, we find a tendency towards unity which is remarkable for its persistence. The most orthodox and sectarian of Brahmins shows in a hundred ways the pervasive influence of Islam. The most bigoted and militant of Muslims reveals his unconscious borrowings from Hindu sources. Sankara's Vedanta has often been regarded as the supreme manifestation of the Hindu intellect. Scholars today discover in it traces of the influence of Muslim thought. Muslim mysticism reached its zenith in the *Masnavi* of Rumi, but there are reasons to hold that he was deeply influenced by Hindu philosophical thought. The temples of North India show traces of the architecture of the mosques. The Indian mosques have incorporated motifs and designs from the temples. There is in every aspect and plane of Indian life unmistakable traces of such fusion and synthesis. In a word, the culture of India is the product of joint aspiration and united endeavour.

Conditions in our country were heading towards a crisis even before the war. The war has only accelerated the process and made the necessity for a solution more imperative and pressing. As soon as the mighty pressure of

war exigencies is removed, the seething discontent is bound to express itself in a demand for fundamental reconstruction in politics and in economic and social conditions. Attempts to divide and weaken our forces have also become more insistent. We hear today of new differences in culture and life. If Indian culture is broken up into its component parts, it will not only confuse and weaken the masses but may even postpone the day of emancipation by provoking clashes between these separated elements. It is our misfortune that there have been leaders who have succumbed to the wiles of imperialists and extended the clash of communities to every sphere of Indian life.

It is useless to blame any individual or community for such a development. Those who are loudest in condemnation are often the people who are most responsible for maintaining and aggravating communal differences and suspicions. It is evident that in a country where men of many communities live in inextricable association, the system of State education must be rigorously secular. Strict religious neutrality must be the rule, for any introduction of religious bias is bound to provoke opposition and conflict. The majority community everywhere must be the more careful in this respect, as majorities all over the world tend to regard themselves as the norm from which minorities are deviations. Nothing is more irritating than such assumption of superiority or even of normality. Kemal Ataturk understood this and the system of education in Turkey is strictly secular and neutral. Will Hindus and Muslims in our country who profess to admire him attempt to adopt his practice?

To emphasize communal divisions in education is, in our present-day context, to play the game of imperialist vested interests. Achievement of political, economic and social freedom is impossible without the liberated energy of the masses. The only means of postponing the awakening of the people is the creation of new communal divisions. The teacher's role has gained a new importance in this crisis, for the teacher is the agency through which alone the masses can be roused and liberated. The teacher also can, if he consents to such abuse of his function, mesmerize the masses into the stupor of inertia or divert their energies into orgies of communal conflict.

The teacher in India must therefore wake up to a consciousness of his importance in the social economy. He has been ill-paid, unhonoured and neglected. Insult has been added to injury by reminding him of the virtues of plain living and high thinking. Reference is constantly made to the ancient traditions of the land. It is suggested that in the past teachers devoted themselves to the search after truth and the dissemination of knowledge without thought of material gain. Such facile references overlook the fact that the teacher in ancient India was free from the bondage of want. He was not paid to teach, but on the other hand, he was assured of the means of subsistence. The *tapobans* of old were in fact disguised endowments. Freed from the struggle for existence, the teacher could pursue truth without care or anxiety.

It is evident that the system of education which was prevalent in ancient times or even before the advent of the British can never be restored. The changed

circumstances have created other demands which can be met only by a new system. The defects of the present system are easy enough to discover. It is also evident that the problem of the educated unemployed cannot be solved by any communal formula. The Hindu community had almost a monopoly in the services for about a hundred years. Yet the problem of unemployment is far more acute among them than among Muslims. Even if there was not a single Muslim candidate, the plethora of candidates among the Hindus would have created an acute problem of unemployment. If on the other hand Muslims were given a monopoly of all the jobs, they would find that in the course of a few decades the supply of their educated men would exceed the demand.

The problem of unemployment cannot therefore be solved by stressing communal differences or creating new communal divisions. It can be solved only by the rehabilitation of our trade and industry and the foundation of a new social order through a reorientation of education. The intensity of the problem of unemployment has attracted attention towards the failure of our education. This has however made us forget that it is the misdirection of educational aims and standards that is responsible for unemployment and other social ills. The aim of education is to develop the individual and determine his position in society. The individual lives in society and these are not therefore incompatible ends. Education is fruitful if it leads to the development of personality and the organization of society as a co-operative and creative endeavour. This can be achieved only through a liberation of the intellect and the integration of the individual

in a social whole. The world today is full of the clash of the individual and society. In the field of politics, the few achieve their selfish interests at the cost of the many. In the field of economics, the wealth and luxury of a privileged few is based on the hunger and nakedness of millions. But for the temporary exigencies of the war, we in Bengal have thousands of educated young men who would have no employment, and yet the country lacks teachers, physicians and other social workers.

The basic reason for the break-down of the educational system in India today is therefore to be found in the hiatus between educational aims and social needs. The present system of education aimed chiefly, if not solely, at the creation of a class of linguists who could help the British conquerors of the country in their administration. Linguistic efficiency rather than all-round human development therefore became the aim of education. There can be no denying that this aim has been at least partially fulfilled. But even here, the results have not been commensurate with the energy, time and money devoted to the purpose. The present system has sapped initiative, resourcefulness and strength of character. Indirectly, it has broadened the gulf between those who received this education and the vast majority who did not or could not. For both the educated and the uneducated, it has created an atmosphere of disillusionment through the destruction of old social values and ideals without creating new ones to replace them.

It is only one aspect of this problem that education throughout India is controlled by the people who understand least about it. From the university to the primary

school, the control of education is in the hands of persons whose primary interests are in other spheres. Education in the villages has been vitiated by local intrigues and manoeuvres. In Bengal, we have the system of District School Boards which control education in the rural areas. Unfortunately, these school boards contain little or no representation of the teachers themselves. Successful or unsuccessful lawyers and doctors, landlords and merchants, and in many cases men whose only profession is to meddle in other people's affairs govern these boards. They have reduced education almost to a mockery. In the secondary schools the same story is repeated with minor variations. In place of the rural dictators of education, we find their urban counterparts riding roughshod over the problems and requirements of the young. It is noteworthy that in all the recent controversy over the proposed Secondary Education Bill, the tussle was over the communal division of spoils. Not a word was said about the place of teachers in the scheme! Nor can the Universities escape censure. Here also, it is outside agencies who have almost unqualified control over the educational apparatus. Everywhere in India the result is seen in an increase in the complexity of the apparatus with a parallel deterioration in the standard and quality of the education imparted. If the youth of a nation is its most precious asset, the nation's capital is being squandered to serve the purposes of unscrupulous politicians and adventurers.

For many decades this fundamental defect in our educational system was not discovered. The chief purpose of education was the securing of a job. English education assured its alumni of employment under the government

or in commercial firms. The very ease in securing posts was however responsible for revealing its fundamental weakness. The number of posts could not keep pace with the number of candidates. The educated had no other opening but government service. Destruction of indigenous industries and commerce restricted the avenues of occupation. On the other hand, the lure of jobs attracted continually increasing numbers into the educational system. The extent of unemployment among the educated classes is the measure of the failure of the prevalent system.

The first step in any educational reform must be the liberation of education from the domination of non-educational interests. Education must be entrusted to persons who have devoted their lives to it. In American or European universities, it is unheard of that Vice-Chancellors or Fellows of Universities should be men who are not themselves actively engaged in teaching. In India on the contrary it almost seems that everybody is entitled to become a Vice-Chancellor or a Fellow of a University except those who have chosen teaching as their life's work. It is sometimes suggested that teachers may not be able to manage the administrative side of education. If they can do so in every other country in the world, why should they not be able to do it here in India? And in any case, it does not lie with an Indian politician or businessman to accuse men of other professions of incapacity or inefficiency.

In England it has been found that difficult problems of policy, administration and management can best be solved by the creation of autonomous boards under the general

control of the government. The government merely exercises supervision over finance and administration but leaves the shaping of policy and its actual execution to the boards themselves. The British Broadcasting Corporation is a shining example of the success of such system. Even the British Board of Education stands largely outside the cross-currents of party politics, though the Minister of Education is a leading member in Parliament of the party in power.

The second step in reconstruction should be to Indianize our education. This does not mean mere substitution of Indians for foreigners in the various administrative and teaching posts. This has already been largely accomplished but the results have not been commensurate with expectations. By Indianization of education is meant the relating of Indian educational modes to Indian social needs. Our education is to this day exotic and foreign. It cuts loose the individual from his cultural moorings and offers him no substitute. The integration of education with the social life of the country can alone help to bridge the widening gulf between the literate and the illiterate. Here also the leadership of educationists who stand outside the struggle and conflict of everyday politics is essential. Instruction in the Indian social and historical background must be secular. Any religious colouring is bound to aggravate the fissiparous tendencies which already exist. Such secularization of education is a task which only men who have devoted themselves wholly to education can achieve.

If we can restore the teacher's sense of self-respect we shall be doing a great service to the cause of education

itself. In France before the war, a teacher's salary was not more than Rs. 60. But he nevertheless had a prestige which was the envy of the other professions. In France the would-be teacher had to make up his mind before he was eighteen. Besides, the teacher was selected on the results of a nation-wide competitive examination. Voluntary election and national selection combined to give the teacher a respect and honour which his low income could in no way diminish. In our country, unfortunately, men very often take to teaching after they have failed in every other avocation. Those who cannot respect themselves cannot win the respect of others.

It is the teacher alone who can bring about the necessary transformation in society. The aims and purposes of education must change. Until now our education has only trained us for administrative, clerical or commercial posts. It has destroyed our mental vigour and independence. We have forgotten to ask questions. Young children are victims of a system that saps their intellectual curiosity and eagerness. We want today an education which will provoke us to continual enquiry. Freedom of mind alone will make us examine the very basis of our social relations and ideals. We want an education which will develop a healthy mind in a healthy body. Our education is purely literary and does not develop manual skill. It must emphasize activity rather than passive acquiescence in our physical and mental life. A system of education which will make our minds inquisitive, our hearts responsive and our hands skilful is the need of the day. An enquiring mind in an active body will not only make for success in individual life but also

lay the foundations of social and national regeneration. To that task we as teachers must bend our minds and energies.

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